rather than from the ideological sphere present in Maimonides' public law. For, basically, I wish to return the discussion to its major point: the need to study Maimonides as legist rather than as ideologue. *Mishneh Torah* is, after all, a halakhic work; and however broadly we may construe that term, the bulk of the text before us deals with law. The modern study of Maimonides ought now to devote major attention to this aspect of his achievement.

Maimonides and Kabbalah

Moshe Idel

The presence of this distinguished audience renders superfluous any elaboration on Maimonides' greatness in matters of halakhah and philosophy. His erudition in these domains of Jewish creation was recognized even by his critics, and the impact of his literary activity was crucial for the later development of Jewish philosophy.

However, the role played by Maimonides in the history of the other important branch of Jewish thought—namely, Kabbalah—is complex and sometimes intriguing. The attitude of most of the Kabbalists to Maimonides' philosophical writings was, *grosso modo*, negative, even critical. Others were his ardent admirers. These contradictory stands will be the subject of our paper. In the following discussion I shall elaborate upon two important points:

A) Maimonides' esotericism and the emergence of Kabbalah;

B) Ecstatic mysticism and the *Guide*.

A. *Maimonides and Kabbalah in Provence and Spain*

Heinrich Graetz has described the emergence of Kabbalah as a reaction to the rationalistic thought of Maimonides, which became widespread shortly before what he considered to be the first Kabbalistic documents.[1] According to this historian, Kabbalah is a lore of alien origin which was adopted by obscurantists whose main interest was to counteract the influence of Maimonides and his followers.[2] Therefore, Graetz's explanation deals with the innovation of Kabbalah as conditioned by the success of Maimonides' thought, without surmising any pre-Kabbalistic Jewish materials. Even more

[1] *History of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1940/5700), III, p. 547: "The rise of this secret lore, which was called Kabbala (tradition) coincides with the time of the Maimonistic controversy through which it was launched into existence." See also Scholem's summary of Graetz's stand, *Les Origines*, pp. 15-16, 18, 20.

[2] *History*, pp. 549ff.

dialectical is David Neumark's conception of Kabbalah: he surmised a long and sometimes subterranean controversy between philosophical and mystical trends of thought in Judaism, controversy which was finally won by Kabbalah, a victory marking a decline of philosophical thought in Judaism.[3] Neumark considered Kabbalah an authentic Jewish trend of thought[4] the success of which resulted in the first Kabbalistic documents, such as the book of *Bahir*; Maimonides represents, in Neumark's eyes, the end of the classical period when philosophical thought was dominant,[5] and his death symbolizes the beginning of the mystical era. As an historian of Jewish philosophy, Neumark was interested in a periodization of Jewish thought, which was regarded almost solely as a confrontation of opposing types of thinking. Gershom Scholem, mostly interested in religious categories, describes Kabbalah as follows:[6] "The Kabbalah, in its historical significance, can be defined as the product of the interpenetration of Jewish Gnosticism and Neoplatonism." According to this approach, the emergence of Kabbalah is the result of the fecundation of two different types of thought, the Gnostic one, which apparently has older roots in Judaism, and the Neoplatonic one, a relatively younger import into Jewish philosophy. Maimonides is seemingly excluded from holding a crucial role in the formative process of early Kabbalah.[7] We can easily see that between Graetz's conception and that of Scholem, Maimonides' thought was almost totally excluded from the discussions of the origins of Kabbalah. Neumark holds an intermediary position since he indicates that Maimonides represents the turning point from classical Jewish philosophy to classical Kabbalah.

I should like to stress an evident characteristic of both Neumark's and Scholem's views: both were more sympathetic to the Kabbalistic phenomenon than Graetz was, and both have a better philosophical formation; their explanations focused upon the Kabbalah as an already existing fact whose ideical components have to be discovered. In contrast to Graetz, these two scholars did not try to answer the question of why Kabbalah emerged at that particular historical period. Graetz's approach, which was simplistic from a phenomenological point of view, aimed at a historical explanation, and this is the reason that he introduced Maimonides into his account of early Kabbalah. Scholem totally rejected Graetz's theory. Here, I should like to argue that this theory, with two major revisions, seems to be a plausible explanation of the emergence of Kabbalah from a historical point of view. The first revision is the assumption, totally unacceptable to Graetz and eventually also to Scholem, that pre-Kabbalistic views existed for centuries, probably in an unarticulated form, in Jewish tradition, including its classical texts—Talmud and Midrash. I assume that these traditions are not Gnostic ones, that is to say, not of Gnostic origin, as Scholem implies, but mythical-cosmogonic and theurgic motifs which eventually might have influenced ancient Gnostic materials and not vice versa. The second important revision I would like to propose to Graetz's theory regards the precise identity of the intellectual movement which started the Kabbalistic reaction; according to Graetz, it was philosophy in general, and Maimonidean philosophy in particular, which set in motion the most important process which generated the Kabbalah. In my opinion, it was mostly the philosophical interpretation of ancient Jewish esoteric matters which produced the opposition of some Jewish authorities.[8]

As a reaction to the dissemination of Maimonides' esotericism, these ancient views crystalized as alternatives which attempted to establish the authentic nature of Jewish theology and esotericism, against the rationalistic-naturalistic formulations proposed by Maimonides.

[3] *Toldot ha-Philosophia be-Israel* (Jerusalem, 1971), I, pp. 166-168; see also Scholem, *Les Origines*, pp. 16-20.

[4] *Toldot*, pp. 185-186.

[5] Ibid., p. 166.

[6] See *Les Origines*, p. 20: "le mouvement Kabbalistique, au sein du judaisme, ne saurait être décrit d'une manière adéquate selon les catégories propres à l'histoire de la philosophie; on ne peut l'exposer que dans les termes de l'histoire des religions." *Kabbalah* (Jersualem, 1974), p. 45; *Major Trends*, p. 175. However, elsewhere (p. 258) Scholem tends to attribute to the prophetic elements and figures flourishing since the end of the twelfth century in Western European areas an important role in the process of the emerging Kabbalistic view of prayer.

[7] See *Major Trends*, p. 24: "...the Kabbalah certainly did not arise as a reaction against philosophical 'enlightenment'." This view was accepted by Joseph Dan—"The Emergence of Mystical Prayer" in J. Dan and F. Talmage, *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 105-106. A more dialectical stand was proposed by Dan in his introduction to the above-mentioned collection of studies (p. 10) where he asks the question if the "unhistorical claim" of the "mystics" that their symbols and texts were "ancient," without supplying a definite answer.

[8] As Scholem rightly indicated, Neoplatonic ideas were influential among the first Kabbalists. See also n.15 below. Therefore, the first Kabbalists were not motivated by an aversion to philosophy; as we know, one of them, R. Abraham ben David, was among the supporters of translation of Jewish philosophical works from Arabic to Hebrew. It is worth remarking that the emergence of the Kabbalah in Provence and its spread in Catalonia at the end of the twelfth century and the early thirteenth century has to be seen as motivated by more than one reason; it seems plausible that, besides the attempts to counteract Maimonides' philosophization of *Sitre Torah*, the Kabbalistic literature may be viewed as a Jewish "Renaissance" which came shortly after the twelfth-century Christian phenomenon. However, this perception cannot easily be proved, and its discussion remains beyond the scope of this essay. Likewise, the possible connection between the emergence of Kabbalah and prophetic and mystical experience reported among Franco-Ashkenazi and Provencal scholars cannot be elaborated upon here; see, meanwhile, Scholem, *Les origines*, pp. 253-263, and n.6 above.

Maimonides' conception of the history of the *Sitre Torah* and their content is, in my opinion, revolutionary. According to him, the peculiar meaning of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* was lost soon after the Tannaitic period. Maimonides implicitly discredited the corpus of mystical literature which included, inter alia, long discussions concerning the nature of these two subjects. Even treatises overtly entitled *Beraita de-Ma'aseh Bereshit* or *Ma'aseh Merkavah* passed unmentioned by him. No one who is aware of Maimonides' wide range of Jewish knowledge can imagine that Maimonides was ignorant of the existence of this brand of literature. Moreover, another important treatise belonging to the *Hekhalot* corpus, *Sefer Shiur Komah*, was openly rejected by Maimonides, who regarded it as a Jewish Byzantine forgery.[9] It seems that he was the first important Jewish theologian who dared oppose most ancient types of Jewish mystical theology, either by ignoring their existence or by an overt attack. The aim of this disentanglement between the concepts of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, mentioned in the Talmud, and their mystical interpretation supplied by the *Hekhalot* literature is obvious. He was convinced that the true significance of the ancient Jewish esotericism is to be found in Aristotelian philosophy, according to its medieval formulations. As he clearly asserts, Maimonides considered himself the thinker who was able to restore the lost Jewish esoteric traditions.[10] This perception of Jewish secret lore is central to Maimonides' Guide, but at least in part it found its expression also in his *Commentary on the Mishnah* and the *Mishneh Torah*, namely in halakhic works. The new approach to *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* was, therefore, more than the conception of a certain Jewish philosopher; the whole halakhic authority of a giant like

[9]See J. Kapaḥ, "A Fragment of an Ancient Yemenite Treatise on Issues of *Sefer Shiur Komah*" in J. Ishaiahu and J. Tubi, *Yahadut Teiman* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 408-409 (Hebrew); A. Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude," pp. 205, 217 n.31.

[10]Cf. Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude," pp. 206-207. On the medieval connection between the argument of "restoration" of ancient ideals and the emergence of revolutionary ideas, see James S. Preus, "Theological Legitimation for Innovation in the Middle Ages," *Viator* 3 (1972) 1-26, esp. 12-19. Although the followers of the great eagle agreed with his identification of *Sitre Torah* with physics and metaphysics, there is at least one major and important exception: R. Jehudah ben Shelomo ha-Kohen ibn Matka, who explicitly separates the ancient secrets from Aristotle's works; see Colette Sirat, "Limmud *Ma'ase Bereshit* be-mishnato shel ha-Rambam uvemishnat Talmidav," *Hagut u-mikra* (Jerusalem, 1977) 6: "לפיכך אל ירחה בלבך להבין אלו הסתרות ממה שהקדמנו מספרי אריסטו" Compare also R. Isaiah of Trani's view referred to below in n.19. Is it sheer coincidence that R. Jehudah seems to adopt an esoteric stand? See Colette Sirat, "La Qabbale d'après Juda b. Salomon ha-Cohen" in G. Nahon and Ch. Touati, eds., *Hommage à Georges Vajda* (Louvain, 1980), pp. 191-202. See especially p. 194, where R. Jehudah explicitly asserts that the Jewish secrets are an oral tradition, קבלה איש מפי איש which cannot be committed to writing.

Maimonides stood behind his formulations of this subject in his commentary on the Mishnah and in the *Mishneh Torah*. Implicitly, Maimonides obliged even non-philosophical readers to accept his perception of *Sitre Torah*. If we assume, as I tried to show in several previous papers,[11] that there is a continuity between ancient concepts and medieval Kabbalah, those contemporaries of Maimonides who formed rings of an esoteric tradition found themselves in a strange situation. The authority of the masters was ruined, the content of their traditions, discred-ited—all this by an indisputable halakhic authority. No wonder that a reaction was required; Maimonides could not be combatted by indifference or silence. This reaction was, in my view, a principal catalyst of the crystalization of early Kabbalah.

Let me discuss in short some evidence which apparently strengthens my above assumptions. Some other reactions against Maimonides' views—like the Kabbalistic perception of the Hebrew language as divine—must remain beyond the scope of our discussion here.

In a manuscript which includes early Kabbalistic traditions—some of them belonging to the Geronese school—there is a highly significant passage. When speaking of the philosophical concept of *causa causarum* as an utmost spiritual entity, the anonymous Kabbalist writes as follows:[12]

> . . . here the philosophers were right in their meticulous discussion, together with [the view] required by our Torah and our tradition, without any divergences [between them]. But the other matters like *Ma'aseh ha-Merkavah* and *Sitre Torah* are traditions in our hands, from the mouth of the prophets and the mouth of Moses, the master of all [prophets], who has seen the face of the King, and about whom it is said: mouth by mouth I shall speak with him, and the masters of rational consideration and the people [dedicating themselves to] speculation

[11]See, e.g., "The Concept of the Torah in Heikhalot Literature and Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought*, I (1981) 23-84 (Hebrew); "Sefirot above Sefirot," "The World of Angels in Human Form" in J. Dan and J. Hacker, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism Presented to Isaiah Tishby* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 1-66 (Hebrew).

[12]Ms. Jerusalem National Library, 8° 2922, fol. 109b; Ms. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Cat-Neubauer No 1945, fol 6a: ...לעילת העילות ובכאן צדקו הפילוסופים בדקדוקם עם מה שותרתינו וקבלתנו אחייבת בלא מחלוקת כלל. ושאר העניינים כמעשה המרכבה וסתרי תורה קבלות בידינו מפי הנביאים ומפי משה אדון כולם ראוה פני המלך אשר נאמר בו פה אל פה אדבר בו, ואין לבעלי שיקול הדעת ואנשי העיון חלק בזה ואף דבריהם והכרחם ומופתיהם לא נקבל. Compare also to another passage from the same text, printed by Gershom Scholem, "The Traces of Gabirol in Kabbalah," *Meassef Sofre Ereẓ Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1940) 176 (Hebrew). See also p. 175, where a passage authored by R. Shemuel ben Mordekahi (an early thirteenth-century author) made an interesting attempt to defend Maimonides, arguing that his system was consonant with that of R. Abraham ben David and R. Jakob the Nazarite of Lunel; however, R. Shemuel did not indicate that Maimonides was a Kabbalist.

have no part in that [i.e., in the traditions], and we shall not accept their words, their necessary [deductions] and their demonstrations.

The philosophers referred to here seem to be of a very specific type: those who have a spiritual concept of Divinity but also a speculative interpretation of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and *Sitre Torah*; I wonder if such a claim can be found in the writings of Jewish philosophers prior to and differing from Maimonides or his disciples. Therefore, even a Kabbalist who was ready to accept the complete agreement between a philosophical and a traditional concept of spirituality of *causa causarum* pointed out explicitly that there are traditions which were not inherited by the philosophers, and hence their views on these matters must be rejected in favor of the interpretation inherited by a long chain of transmitters, beginning with Moses. It is highly significant from our point of view that R. Ezra of Gerone opens an important discussion on the emanationist processes, referred to by the terms *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, with the following statement:[13] "Where does our master Moses come into conflict with the Kabbalah." As Alexander Altmann has already shown, the Neoplatonic interpretation of the Midrashic passage, proposed by R. Ezra and rejected by Maimonides, has ancient roots.[14]

Interestingly enough, the same discussion of Maimonides is the point of departure to another early Kabbalistic text; in a collectanaea of Kabbalistic material, which includes also excerpts from R. Ezra's works, we find, just before the famous letter which R. Isaac the Blind addressed to Naḥmanides and R. Jonah Gerondi, the following passage:[15]

[13] "באיזה דבר בא רבי משה כנגד הקבלה" See Gershom Scholem, "A New Document on the History of the Emergence of Kabbalah," *Sefer Bialik* (Tel Aviv, 1934) 157. Compare also the more subtle criticism inherent in R. Ezra's discussion on pp. 155-156. See also Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 82-83.

[14] "A Note on the Rabbinic Doctrine of Creation," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 6/7 (1955/1956), especially 205-206; M. Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," pp. 242-243. Compare Guide II, ch. 26, where he discusses *Pirke de R. Eliezer*, ch. III. Interestingly enough, R. Ezra uses the Guide in order to extract from it the Platonic material rejected by Maimonides. Compare also a similar phenomenon in R. Ya'akov ibn Sheshet's passage in *Sefer ha-Emunah ve-ha-Bitaḥon*, ch. XVIII, discussed in Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," pp. 265-266

[15] Ms. Vatican, 202, fol. 59a, Ms. Harvard, Houghton, 58, fol. 108b: ועניין הארץ מהיכן נבראת (פרקי דר' אליעזר, ג) שתמס הר"מ במוזל לר' אליעזר הגדול שמעתי בשם מורי נ"ר כי ידוע הוא שכוונת ר' אליעזר הוא על הארץ העליונה והוא היה סבור שאמ' על הארץ התחתונה ולכן תמה היאך אמ' מהשלג שהרי מד' יסודות נבראת ע"כ. This passage is found in the Vatican manuscript just before the famous epistle of R. Isaac the Blind, printed by Scholem, "A New Document," pp. 143-144. The two above-mentioned manuscripts contain Kabbalistic material which was collected in R. Shelomo ben Adret's circle, apparently by R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, the master referred to being R. Isaac ben Todros. It seems that R. Isaac ben Todros is the real author of this interpetation of the Midrashic passage; it occurs

And concerning the issue of "Whence was the earth created," which was the subject of Maimonides' refutation of R. Eliezer the Great, I heard in the name of my Master—may God guard him—that it is known that R. Eliezer's intention was [connected with]the supernal earth, while he [Maimonides] thought that he [R. Eliezer] said it on the nether earth and therefore he [Maimonides] was stupefied how he [R. Eliezer] said, "From the snow" [was the earth created], since from the four elements was [the earth] created.

I suppose that the master mentioned in this quotation is R. Shelomo ben Abraham ibn Adret or R. Isaac ben Todros, the author of it being, therefore, one of his students, seemingly R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon. Almost a century after the question posed to R. Ezra, the negative attitude of Maimonides toward a Midrashic text was criticized, and the Kabbalistic interpretation was proposed as an explanation which solved Maimonides' quandary. R. Eliezer did not describe, according to this Kabbalist, the formation of the terrestrial world as conceived by Maimonides but the process taking place in the supernal world, therein a "female" sefirah: "Binah," or "Malkhut," was emanated from the "snow" which may refer to the highest sefirah—Keter—or, eventually, to a lower one.

I would like to stress, once more, the fact that these Kabbalists did not reject philosophy qua philosophy; they were sometimes ready to adopt Neoplatonic views, but they were aware of the difference between their traditions and the philosophical interpretations of esotericism, which were conspicuously opposed.

Another overt attack on Maimonides' esotericism is included in Naḥmanides' homily *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*:[16]

neither in R. Ezra's works (compare his remarks on Maimonides' view on this subject in his *responsum* in Scholem, "A New Document," pp. 157-158, or his *Commentary on Song of Songs, Kitve ha-Ramban*, II, p. 494) nor in R. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia's *Sha'ar ha-Razim*, where, again, Maimonides is criticized (Ms. New York, JTS, Mic. 1887, fol. 47a-b). Interestingly enough, Naḥmanides rejects Maimonides' view also, offering, however, a philosophically oriented explanation without hinting at a Kabbalistic esoteric understanding of the Midrash (see his Commentary on Genesis, I, 8) and compare also to R. Yom Tov Ashvili's *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, pp. 51-52, where he refers to the philosophical stands of R. Shemuel ibn Tibbon and R. Ya'akov Anatoli. Compare also to R. Shimeon Lavi's discussion of Maimonides' criticism of the Midrash in his *Ketem Paz* (Djerba, 1940), fol. 42c.

[16] *Kitve ha-Ramban*, I, p. 155: יש בתורה סודות מעשה בראשית שהזכיר אתקלוט וסוד מעשה מרכבה וסודות אחרים רבים שנאמרו מפה אל פה ואינם נמסרים אלא לחסיד שבישראל ועוד שאין אחר זוכה בהן מכל (!), הנה אמר בפירוש שאין חכמי הגוים - והם הפילוסופים שהוא בימי הפילוסופים היה, מיד אחרי אריסטו, שכלם אינם יודעים ביצירה מה שיודע קטן שבישראל. Compare also to Naḥmanides' assertion in the *Commentary on Genesis*, I, 1: ...מפני שמעשה בראשית סוד עמוק אינו מובן מן המקראות ולא יודע בוריו אלא מפי הקבלה עד משה רבינו מפי הגבורה ויודעיו חייבין

> There are, in the Torah, the secrets of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, mentioned by Onkelos, and the secret of *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, and many other secrets,[17] which were transmitted from mouth to mouth, and they are not delivered but to the pious men among the Jews, and any other person cannot gain them at all. Behold, he [Onkelos] explicitly said that the wise men of the Gentiles, namely the philosophers—since he lived in the days of the philosophers, immediately after Aristotle—know, on the matters of creation, less than a small child of Israel.[18]

The two main characteristics of ancient Jewish esotericism—the secrets were transmitted exclusively to pious men of Jewish stock and the depreciation of the knowledge of philosophers, including Aristotle—are clear allusions to Maimonides' totally different view of the same issues. The content of Jewish traditions could not pass into the hands of non-Jews, a clear polemical reference to the assumption, espoused for example by R. Samuel ibn Tibbon, that ancient Jewish lore was lost among the Jews but is extant among the Gentiles.[19]

Therefore, the account of creation is primarily an oral tradition which cannot be deduced from the Biblical text, as Maimonides would argue. Moreover, it must remain an esoteric matter, as against the philosopher's identification of this matter with Aristotelian physics. Compare also to the presumably Midrashi dictum: "כח מעשיו הגיד לעמו, להגיד: כח מעשה בראשית לבשר דם אי אפשר" quoted by both Maimonides *(Introduction to the Guide)* and Naḥmanides (on Genesis, I, 1). See also the interesting discussion of R. Jesaiah de Trani the Younger who argues that the account of the Creation and the account of the Chariot are esoteric matters which were transmitted orally among ancient Jewish masters but which are no longer in our hands; it is forbidden, he continues, to use Aristotelian material in order to explain these issues as Maimonides has done. Cf. Simḥah Asaf, *Sources for the History of Education in Israel* (Tel Aviv, 1931), II, pp. 96-97 (Hebrew). See also a thirteenth-century Kabbalistic text attributed to R. Hai Gaon, wherein he allegedly asserts: הזחרו באלה העניינים ומכת אנשי הסברות, וי על מאן דסמיך בחורפיה ובעירניה ואזיל רשיה בתר בגלחי דשביק רזיא דנביאיא וחכימיא דמבני ישראל, ואילף חכמתא דפילוסופיא, דהיא חכמתא אחירי כעין חכמתא דתרשא וקוסמיא.... Quoted by R. Isaac of Acre, *Meyrat Eynaim*, p. 56. Compare the phrase "דסמיך בחורפיה" to the assertion of R. Isaac of Acre (ibid., p. 37) that Naḥmanides "חיה סומך...על חדחדו" This text occurs in several manuscripts where it is attributed to a certain Moroccan sage: see, e.g., Ms. Jerusalem, 1959, fol. 207a.

[17]Compare Naḥmanides' *Homily on Ecclesiastes*, p. 190, quoted below, n.43.

[18]Cf. *Shemot Raba* 30, 9. It seems that Naḥmanides' mention of Onkelos in this context may be an attempt to counteract Maimonides' rather positive view of this translator, whom he considered to be a theological authority who sustains his own philosophical stands. See I. Twersky, *Introduction*, pp. 57-58 and n.92. Naḥmanides' argument was used by R. Menashe ben Israel in his attack on philosophic psychology; see *Nishmat Hayyim* II, 1 (Warsaw, 1876), fol. 29a; R. Elnatan ben Moshe Kalkish, *Even Sappir*, Ms. Paris (BN) 727, fol. 70a; and Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," p. 279.

[19]See the treatment of this theme in the Maimonidean school in Aviezer Ravitzky, "The Thought of R. Zerahiah b. Isaac b. Shealtiel Hen and Maimonidean-Tibbonian Philosophy in the 13th Century" (Ph.D. Thesis, Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 51-57 (Hebrew); idem, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Guide," p. 116. It is highly important to stress in this context that Naḥmanides did not accept this conception and even pointed out that the remnants of ancient Jewish esotericism were denied by the philosophers. See Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition," pp. 61-62.

It is worthwhile to compare this tacit, although unequivocal, rejection of Maimonides' parameters of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* to that of an anonymous Kabbalist. At the end of R. David ben Yehudah he-Hasid's commentary of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*, whose details cannot be discussed in this format, a scribe rightfully remarked:[20]

> ... most of the discussions of the author are those of Maimonides in *Sefer Ha-Mada'*, and the author copied everything that was, in his eyes, true according to the true Kabbalah, and everything which is not in accord with the Kabbalah he put aside, like what concerns the matter of 'let us make man in our image' and many other similar issues, and, doubtless, we have to be thankful to him.

Although the scribe articulated a rather liberal attitude toward Maimonides' cosmological scheme in *Sefer Ha-Mada'*, the measuring rod is evident: the Kabbalistic tradition alone can offer legitimization to any speculative material which otherwise would be neglected. Interestingly enough, the single issue explicitly mentioned is the meaning of the term "Adam," a term which was interpreted in Maimonidean thought as "the intellect,"[21] that was obviously rejected because of the anthropomorphistic conception of R. David which constituted one of the most hidden secrets in his Kabbalistic system.[22]

It seems that the reaction of those who possessed esoteric traditions regarding *Ma'aseh Bereshit* was prompt: Kabbalistic interpretations of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* became a literary genre of early Kabbalah,[23] to which contributed R.

[20]Ms. Oxford, 1911, fol. 174b: כי רוב דברי המחב' הם דברי הרמב"ם ז"ל בספר המדע והמח' ז"ל כל עניין שהיה אמת אצלו כפי הקבלה האמיתי', העתיק אותו, ושלא נתאמתה כפי הקבל' הניחו, כענין מ"ש בענין נעשה אדם בצלמנו וכהנ' רבו' ובלי ספק יש לנו להחזי' לו טוב'.

[21]See Aviezer Ravitzki, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Guide," pp. 103-108.

[22]See M. Idel, "The Image of Man above the Sefirot," *Da'at* 4 (1980) 41-55 (Hebrew).

[23]See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 59-87. See also R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's characterization of R. Ezra and R. Azriel's works: "וגם מרשו שם מעשה בראשית ומעשה מרכבה מאשר קבלו מפי הרב החסיד סגי נהור ז"ל" *Badde ha-Aron*, Ms. Paris 840, fol. 15a; compare R. Ezra's *Commentary on Aggadot*, Ms. Vatican, 294, fol. 44b: "ע"כ כתבתי ראשי פרקי' ממעשה מרכבה" See also R. Joseph Gikatilla's statement that the meaning of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* was traded down since the Sinaic revelation to R. Isaac the Blind: וקבלה יש בידינו על היות אלו החכמים משלשלת קבלת מעשה מרכבה מסיני עד עמוד הימיני החסיר ר' יצחק סגי נהור בן הקדוש רבי אברהם.... See his *Commentary on the Haggada*, printed at the end of R. Moses de Leon's *Ha-Nefesh Ha-Ḥakhamah* (Basle, 1608), fol. 11,b,1.

Isaac Sagi Nahor, R. Ezra of Gerone, R. Asher ben David, R. Jacob ben Sheshet and R. Joseph ben Shmuel. Another subject intentionally neglected by Maimonides, *Sefer Yeẓirah*, turned into a classical text of early Kabbalah, and the numerous commentaries written by Kabbalists are an obvious evidence of the intention of their authors to formulate their mystical interpretations of *Ma'aseh Bereshit*. In contrast to Maimonides' identification of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* as the science of nature, the Kabbalists viewed it as representing the intradivine cosmogonic processes, thereby proposing their traditions as opposed to Maimonides' innovations. No less critical were the remarks of Kabbalists such as R. Yom Tov Ashvili and R. Joseph Karo regarding Maimonides' interpretation *Ma'aseh Merkavah* as referring to metaphysics.[24] The innovative nature of Maimonides' Guide was described by an early Kabbalist, R. Meshullam da Piera, in this verse:[25] "Your book

It is worth mentioning that only later, in the second half of the thirteenth century, do we witness a floruit of Kabbalistic commentaries on *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Interestingly enough, R. Isaac ben Ya'akov ha-Kohen, one of the first commentators on *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, who presents himself as a follower of Maimonides, immediately afterwards asserts that his interepretations stem from ancient traditions traded over orally by ascetics and wise men; he implies that he discloses his Kabbalistic tradition, since no philosopher has elaborated upon Maimonides' elusive remarks on the issue of *Merkavah*. See Gershom G. Scholem, "R. Isaac's Commentary on the Chariot of Ezekiel," *Tarbiẓ* II (1931) 194 (Hebrew). I prefer not to react in detail to Scholem's remark (p. 204, n.2) concerning the positive attitude of the early Kabbalists toward Maimonides!

This explanation of the emergence of the Kabbalistic literature on *Ma'aseh Bereshit* differs from Scholem's hypothesis, according to which Kabbalistic interest in the processes of creation was motivated by the search for a "ladder of ascent" intended to enable the individual salvation of the early Kabbalists. See his *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York, 1972), pp. 38-39. To the extent that this view is valid, it demonstrates the impact of Neoplatonism on early Kabbalah; cf. M. Idel, "Types of Redemptive Activity in the Middle Ages" in Zvi Barash, ed., *Messianism and Eschatology* (Jerusalem, 1983), p. 273 (Hebrew).

[24]See Isadore Twersky, "Some Non-Halakic Aspects of the Mishneh Torah" in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 112-113; Jacob Katz, "Halakhah and Kabbalah as Competing Subjects of Study," *Da'at* 7 (1981) 42 (Hebrew); Zeev Harvey, "Kabbalistic Elements in Crescas' *Light of the Lord*," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* II (1982/3) 82-84 (Hebrew).

[25]חדש אמרים ספרך לא נכתבו כהם בהגדות ולא נזכרו H. Brody, "Shirei Meshullam ben Shlomo Dapiera," *Yediot ha-Makhon le-Ḥeker ha-Shirah ha-Ivrit* IV (Berlin/Jerusalem, 1938) 100; see also p. 39: מורה נבוכים החרש יפך בלום - הן הדברים לא שמענם עד הלום. ישאו עונם אומרים כי הכתב - משל, והנביא אשר אתו חלום. Compare also to the Epistle of R. Shelomo ben Abraham of Montpellier during the first controversy on Maimonides' works: בשמעו מקצתם זקנים ונערים מפרסמים דברים חדשים מקרוב באו לא שערום אבותם, הולכים... הדרך לא טוב אחר מחשבותם, להרוס הקבלות ולמשול משלים בדברי התורות, להפך למשל ולהבל מעשה בראשית ותולדות קין והבל. *Kevutzat Ketavim*, ed. Halberstam (Bamberg, 1875), p. 51. From the context, it is obvious that Maimonides was connected to this intellectual direction.

innovated matter which were neither written in the Aggadot, nor [even] mentioned [there]."

It seems that the feeling that the great theologian attempted to invent an alternative lurks also behind Naḥmanides' famous passage in his intoduction to commentary to the Torah:[26] "my words will not be comprehended nor known at all by any reasoning or contemplation, excepting from the mouth of a wise Kabbalist [speaking] into the ear of an understanding recipient; reasoning about them is foolishness." However, it is only later that a Kabbalist explicitly articulated what I surmise to be the basic Kabbalistic attitude toward Maimonides. In his introduction to *Tola'at Ya'akov*, R. Meir ibn Gabbai asks ironically:[27]

> What caused the Rabbi [Maimonides] to rationally consider [the content of] *Sitre Torah*? His being naked [i.e., ignorant] from the true tradition, which is transmitted to the elite, which is the beginning of the knowledge of our Creator, be He blessed, and this worship; as well as his [i.e., Maimonides'] dedication to the alien sciences, the foe of Sarah, who behaves in an arbitrary manner.

It was, according to this Kabbalist, the total ignorance of esoteric lore that induced Maimonides into the adventurous attempt arbitrarily to describe the *Sitre Torah* qua philosophical subjects.[28] Had Maimonides received, later on, the Kabbalistic tradition, he would have changed his mind.[29] Therefore, the disclosure of the authentic tradition is the best antidote to Maimonides'

[26]Ed. Chavel, p. 8. On the perception of Kabbalistic secrets in Naḥmanides' thought, see Idel, "We have no Kabbalistic Traditon," pp. 59-60. Compare also to R. Joseph ben Todros Abulafia's criticism of Maimonides who defends Kabbalah, with him, simply as "tradition," as against the "Sevarah." Cf. Silver, *The Maimonidean Criticism*, p.181, and that of his brother R. Meir; cf. Bernard Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), p. 58.

[27]*Tola'at Ya'akov* (Jerusalem, n.d.), fol. 3b: ומה שהביאו לרב לשקול בדעתו סתרי תורה - היותו ערום מן הקבלה האמיתית המסורה ליחידי סגולה, אשר הוא הפתח לידיעת יוצרנו ית' ועבורתו; ודפו אחרי החכמות החצוניות צרת שרה, ההולכת אחר שרירות לבה. On ibn Gabbai's criticism of Maimonides in general, see Roland Goetschel *Meir Ibn Gabbai, Le discours de la Kabbale Espagnole* (Leuven, 1981), pp. 59-65, and also his *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, III, ch. 11 (Jerusalem, 1973), fol. 70b: ויש לרב המורה ז"ל בזה המדרש דעות זרות, אסורות למקבלי התורה יחסם אל חכמי ישראל הקדושים, ובאמת לא יתיחסו כי אם לו, והמאמינים יחדעים כי הם דברי עצמו.

[28]Compare to R. Ya'akov ben Ya'akov ha-Kohen's statement concerning R. Abraham ibn Ezra's using his reason and speculation [כפי דעתו וסברתו] when discussing *Shi'ur Komah*, which resulted, according to this Kabbalist, in missing the essential meaning of this issue; cf. the text printed in Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot," p. 250.

[29]It seems that, at the period when the author composed his early work, he was not aware of the legend concerning Maimonides' conversion to Kabbalah in his late age; Ibn Gabbai himself refers to such a tradition in his later *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, II, ch. 13, fol. 88b. Scholem, "Mi-Hoker le-Mekubbal," pp. 95ff.

intellectual error, since it could convince even the master himself.

According to an anonymous Kabbalist, who apparently composed a short treatise in the fifteenth century, he committed Kabbalistic views to writing in order:[30]

> to show that, without the holy Kabbalah, no wise man can know any true issue of our holy and pure belief, neither Maimonides ז"ל, nor R. Abraham ibn Ezra ז"ל, nor any other wise man who [speculates] according to the acquisited intellect.[31]

Let us now summarize the previous discussion. Maimonides intentionally ignored the mystical interpretation of the account of the Creation and the account of the Chariot, proposing instead a philosophically-oriented explanation; in the case of *Shiur Komah*, Maimonides' attitude was unequivocally negative. Among the first Kabbalists, reactions against the rationalistic attitude towards Jewish esotericism arose immediately, and they formulated the esoteric traditions presumably existing in their hands, as opposed to Maimonides' view, or criticized him without breaking the veil of esotericism which surrounded these issues, such as in the case of Naḥmanides.[32]

II

The divergences between Maimonides' view of *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* and the Kabbalistic perception of these issues had, in my opinion, an important repercussion on another central subject: according to the Kabbalists, the commandments are connected with, and dependent upon, the higher entities, namely the *Sefirot*, which emerged through a series of processes named *Ma'aseh Bereshit* and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. It seems reasonable to assume that the first known Kabbalists already were in possession of a holistic perception of both Sefirotic theosophy and rationale of commandments; hence any discreditation of the theosophical structure as the philosophical interpretations of the Account of Creation and the Account of the Chariot implied was conceived also as a devaluation of the secret significance of the commandments.

[30]Ms. Berlin, 193 (Qu. 833), fol. 88a-b; Ms. New York, JTS, 1805, fol. 23b: לכן אכתוב קצת ראיות מהקבלה הקדושה מחכמי ישראל הקדושים המקובלים ז"ל להראות כי לולי הקבלה הקדושה אין מבוא לשום חכם לדעת שום דבר אמתי מאמונתיתו הקדושה והטהרה לא ה"ה הרמב"ם ז"ל ולא הר"א ן' עזרא ז"ל ולא שום חכם אחר, על דרך השכל הקנוי.

[31]The relation between acquired intellect and philosophy on the one hand and emanated intellect and Kabbalah on the other will be discussed in detail elsewhere. Meanwhile, see the text of Abulafia, *Sitre Torah*, Ms. Paris, 774, fol. 117b (below in n.126) on the attitudes of R. Moses of Burgos, R. Joshua ibn Shuaib, etc.

[32]On his esotericism, as against the relatively exoteric inclination of other Geronese Kabbalists, see Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition," pp. 52ff. An issue which is worthy of a minutious examination is the possibility that Kabbalists who publicly exposed Kabbalistic views and who were criticized by R. Isaac the Blind did it as part of the Maimonidean controversy; see Scholem, "A New Document," pp. 143-146.

The interdependence of these two subjects is already alluded to by R. Ezra of Gerone:[33] the fifth question concerns the rationales of the Torah as connected to *Ma'aseh Bereshit*[34] and *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. The term used by R. Ezra, *Ta'ame Torah*, explicitly explains the rationales of the commandments, which are enumerated immediately afterwards. The close relation between the commandments and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* is well known among the Kabbalists of the late thirteenth century, who seemingly continued prior views. According to the anonymous[35] *Iggeret ha-Kodesh:*[36]

> The conjunction [between male and female] is a very high matter, when it is accomplished in a proper way. And this great mystery is the mystery of the *Merkavot*, which are linked to each other like male and female. And if this thing would be shameful, the Master of the world would not command to do them and to put them on that place which is holier and purer than all [other] places.

The human copulation is, therefore, a way of *Imitatio Dei*[37] since the supernal syzygies *(Merkavot)* are reflected on the human level; the author explicitly argues against Maimonides' deprecation of the sexual act, and the very composition of this short, but highly influential, treatise may well be regarded as being motivated by a reaction to the Aristotelian outlook as it was

[33]See Scholem, "A New Document," p. 159: "השאלה החמישית בטעמי התורה הקשורים במעשה בראשית ובמעשה מרכבה" Compare R. Ezra's view in his Commentary on Song of Songs, ed. Ch. D. Chavel, *Kitve ha-Ramban* (Jerusalem, 1964), II, p. 496: "ויש לנו לפרש כפי דרכנו כל מצוה ומצוה מאיזו מדה היא" See also the examples adduced by Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, II, pp. 431-432. This comprehensive view of the commandments as representing the active counterpart of the supernal Divine structure runs against the assumption expressed by Dan (n.7 above), pp. 87, 107-110, that the peculiar problem of prayer forced the first Kabbalists to compose intermediary structures to enable prayer to a personal entity. See also Lawrence Kaplan's response, ibid., pp. 122-123, 126-127.

[34]Compare Naḥmanides' Commentary on Leviticus, 19, 19 (ed. Chavel, p. 121): "והנה המערב כלאים מכחיש ומערב מעשה בראשית." And R. Joshua ibn Shuaib's version of R. Ezra's views on *Arayot:* ועל דרך הקבלה הוא סוד מסודות התורה...והכלל כי כל הבא על אחת מכל אלו העריות הוא מכחיש במעשי בראשית. *Derashot* (Krakau, 1573), fol. 51a, and, below n.36, the quotation from *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, p. 326.

[35]See Shraga Abramson's proposal that R. Ezra of Gerone is the author of this Epistle, "Iggeret ha-Kodesh Attributed to Naḥmanides," *Sinai* 90 (1982) 232-253 (Hebrew).

[36]*Kitve ha-Ramban*, ed. Chavel, II, p. 324: החבור הוא ענין עלוי גדול כשהוא כפי הראוי. והסוד הגדול הזה הוא סוד המרכבות, דהיו מחוברות זה בזה כדמיון זכר ונקבה. ואילו היה בדבר גנאי לא היה מצוה ארון עלם לעשותם ולשום אותם על מקום הקדוש והטהור שבכל המקומות. Compare also p. 326: להקב"ה במעשה בראשית. אם כן נמצא חבור האדם לאשתו כשהוא כראוי שהוא סוד בנין העולם וישובו ונעשה בו שותף On the antiquity of sexual mysticism in Jewish sources, see M. Idel, "Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in Kabbalah."

[37]See p. 322.

presented in the Guide.[38] The close connection between commandments and supernal *Merkavah* is evident in R. Shelomo ben Abraham ibn Adret:[39] "This is the issue of the *Merkavah*, since the matters alluded to by the commandments are *Ma'aseh Merkavah*." This is also the view of R. Menahem Recanati, who asserts in the introduction to his commentary on *Ta'ame ha-Miẓvot:*[40] "The commandments depend upon the Supernal *Merkavah*...and each and every commandment depends upon one part of the *Merkavah*."

This correlation between commandments and *Merkavah* has deep theurgical implications; there was more than a pure structural correspondence between the Supernal *Merkavah*, alias the *Adam Elyon*[41] or Sefirotic Realm, and the 613 commandments; the latter were conceived as instrumental for the Kabbalists' power to influence Divinity as theurgical practices which constitute the very core of the mainstream of Kabbalah. This theurgical understanding of the commandments was jeopardized by the Maimonidean historical-rationalistic perception of commandments. This is the reason that almost all of the Kabbalists were reticent about Maimonides' view of the commandments; this reservation is evident in Naḥmanides' *Commentary on the Pentateuch,*[42] and I should like to quote here a significant remark of Naḥmanides' which deals with the problem of the commandments of *Shemitot* and *Yovel* but is relevant to his perception of *Ta'ame Mizvot* in general:[43]

> But those issues and others similar to them, no person is capable of comprehending their nature through his own reason, but only through [Kabbalistic] tradition, and this is an evident issue in the Torah, for whoever listens to the rationales of the commandments through [Kabbalistic] tradition, as it is proper, is he who receives from the mouth of a receiver until Moses, our master, [who received] from the mouth of God.

Therefore, the rationales of commandments are part of the esoteric tradition,[44] of which Naḥmanides implicitly indicates that he is a recipient. This view found convincing expression in ibn Gabbai's *Tola'at Ya'akov:*[45]

> Don't be lured by those who arbitrarily innovate rationales for the Commandments but be aware that whoever did not receive *Sitre Torah* from his masters, and he thinks to consider them rationally, his action is paramount to an illegal interpretation of the Torah.

Naḥmanides' attitude toward Maimonides' view of commandments was prevalent among the Kabbalists,[46] including, for example, the greatest defender of Maimonides, R. Yom Tob Ashvili; he was compelled to surmise that Maimonides himself was not convinced that he had disclosed the real significance of the commandments:[47]

[38]See p. 325: וידוע שאלו לא יהיה בדבר קדושה גדולה, לא יהיו קורין לחבור ידיעה ואין הדבר כאשר סבר וחשב הרב ר' משה ז"ל במורה הנבוכים, בהיותו משבח לאריסטו על מה שאמר כי חוש המשוש הוא חרפה לנו. חלילה חלילה אין הדבר כמאמר היוני לפי שיש במאמרו זה שמץ מינות שאינו מורגש See the Guide, II, 33. On Maimonides' view of sex in general, see Twersky, *Introduction*, p. 464. Morton Harris' thesis that this Epistle was composed against the gnostic aversion to sex is untenable as is his other assertion that Kabbalah is tantamount to metaphysics; see "Marriage as Metaphysics, A Study of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*," *HUCA* 33 (1962) 197-220. Compare also Joseph Dan, "Hakdamat ha-Ra'avad le-Sefer Ba'ale ha-Nefesh," *Sinai* 77 (1975) 143-145, who argues that R. Abraham ben David reacted against Aristotelian views when he wrote his treatise on sexual issues. I should like to add here that in R. Abraham's introduction there are several still unnoticed hints to Kabbalistic views, which deserve a separate study.

[39]See ibn Adret's "He'arah be-'inyan ma'aseh ha-Mizvot" in Fromkin's *Seder Amran Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1912), p. 79: "וזה ענין המרכבה שהדברים הרמוזים במצות הן הן מעשה מרכבה" Compare to his students' apperception of the material details regarding the worship in the Temple as allusions to the "supernal Merkavah"; see Carmi Y. Horowitz, "An Unpublished Sermon of R. Joshua ibn Shu'eib" in I. Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 267, ll.44-46, 61; 269, ll-115-119; and see already Naḥmanides' Commentary on Exodus, 25, 21. See also R. Jonah Gerondi, *Sha'are ha-Avodah* (Bnei Berak, 1967), p. 58.

[40]Ed. H. Lieberman (London, 1963), fol. 3a: "והמצות תלויות במרכבה העליונה...וכל מצוה ומצוה תלויה בחלק א' מן המרכבה" On the sources of this view and its context, see M. Idel, "The Concept of the Torah" (n.11 above), pp. 68-69.

[41]Or sometimes, "Shi'ur Komah"; the earlier Kabbalists eventually hesitated to elaborate upon the anthropomorphic structure of the Supernal Sefirot; according to R. Meshulam Dapiera, his teachers, the Geronese Kabbalists, "know the size of their creator but they stopped their words out of fear of the heretics" (Brody, n.25 above, p. 104, and compare to p. 102). See also Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Tradition," p. 72, n.74; Silver (*Maimonidean Criticism*, p. 191) misunderstood these lines.

On early Kabbalistic anthropomorphism, which was seriously endangered by Maimonides' sharp criticism of *Shi'ur Komah*, see Idel, "Sefirot above Sefirot" and "The Image of Man above the Sefirot," pp. 41-55.

[42]See, e.g., his *Commentary on Pentateuch*, ed. Chavel, I, p. 43; II, pp. 97 and 101; and see n.63 below.

[43]*Homily on Ecclesiast*, ed. Ch. D. Chavel, *Kitve ha-Ramban* (Jerusalem, 1964), I, p. 190: אבל דברים הללו וכיוצא בהם אין אדם עומד על אמתתם מדעת עצמו אלא בקבלה. וזה הענין מבואר בתורה לכל מי ששמע טעם המצות בקבלה כראוי, והוא מקבל מפי מקבל עד משה רבינו מפי הגבורה.

[44]Compare Naḥmanides' remark shortly beforehand (p. 189) where he clearly refers to Maimonides: אבל אני איני מאמין אלא לדברי רבותינו שכיוצא בדברים הללו אין דעת חכם יכול להם בשום סברא. He points to Maimonides' interpretation of Psalms 104,5 in the Guide II, 28. See also the passage from *Torat ha-Shem Temimah*, p. 155 (quoted above, n.16) and p. 162 and compare to R. Shelomo ben Abraham ibn Adret, *Responsa* I, no. 94, and to R. Todros Abulafia's *Oẓar ha-Kavod*, fol. 25a.

[45]Fol. 3a: אל יפתוך הבחדים מלבם טעמים למצות דע כי כל מי שלא קבל סתרי תורה שלא כהלכה לשקלן בדעתו, הרי הוא מגלה פנים בתורה שלא כהלכה. Although Maimonides is not explicitly mentioned, a comparison of this text to that quoted above (n.27) is sufficient to demonstrate that both texts deal with the same person. See also Basilea's *Emunat Ḥakhamim*, fol. 19b, where Maimonides' "inventions" are referred to.

[46]See, e.g., R. Meshullam Dapiera's criticism regarding Maimonides' rationales summarized in Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, pp. 187-188, 195.

[47]*Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, ed. K. Kahana (Jerusalem, 1982), pp. 73-74: ואומר אני כי

> And I say that the true [Kabbalistic] tradition which was in the possession of our Rabbi [i.e., Naḥmanides] concerning the issues of sacrifice is the true one, and that the rationale of the Rabbi, [the author of] the Guide ז״ל on it, seems very weak....And my opinion is that the Rabbi [the author of] the Guide ז״ל on the rationale of this [i.e., sacrifice] and many other rationales he wrote regarding the commandments [did not write it] out of his belief that it is the essential rationale of that commandment, but he wanted to offer a rationale of them that even the vulgus will be able to answer the unbelievers, using the rational issues '[proposed by Maimonides].'

In Ritba's opinion, the rationale offered by Maimonides did not constitute the real meaning of the commandment but a strategic maneuver intended to arm the vulgus against the inquiries of the unbelievers. According to this Kabbalist, the real rationale is the Kabbalistic one found in Naḥmanides,[48] whereas that of Maimonides is apparently innovated by the philosopher: "he wanted to offer."

These perceptions of Maimonides' theory of commandments as innovations[49] possibly contributed to the appearance of a new literary genre among the early Kabbalists: the commentary on *Ta'ame Miẓvot*. R. Isaac the Blind,[50] R. Ezra of Gerone, R. Azriel of Gerone and R. Joseph Gikatilla, R. Moses de Leon, R. Joseph of Hamadan, and the large place of the interpretation of commandments in the Zoharic literature, all these are significant evidence of the immense effort invested by the Kabbalists in order to expose their views of

הקבלה האמיתית אשר היתה לרבי׳ ז״ל בעניני הקרבן - אמיתית וכי טעמו של הרב המורה ז״ל בזה נראה חלש מאד...ודעתי ברב המורה ז״ל בטעם זה ובטעמים רבים אחרים שכתב במצות כי לא מאשר יאמין הוא שהוא עקר טעם המצוה ההיא אלא שרצה לתת קצת טעם בהם עד שאפי׳ ההמון ידע להשיב בהם לאפיקורוס בדברים שכליים קצת. Compare also R. Jehudah Arieh of Modena, *Ari Nohem*, p. 23, and Twersky, *Introduction*, pp. 401-403; R. Joseph Ashkenazi's text printed in Gershom Scholem, "New Informations on R. Joseph Ashkenazi, ha-'Tanna' of Safad," *Tarbiẓ* 28 (1959) 210 (Hebrew), and, in another context, R. Joseph Gikatilla's *Ginnat Egoz* (Hanau, 1615), fol. 15a; and Balisea's *Emunat Ḥakhamim*, fol. 19b. Balisea's perception of Maimonides is that his exposition of the rationales of commandments or *Ma'aseh Merkavah* were not considered by the author as exhaustive, some of them, seemingly the most profound one, did not occur in the Guide. This is also the line of defense adopted by Shelomo Maimon in his *Heshek Shelomo*; see Idel, "Perceptions of Kabbalah," para. II.

[48]Compare *Sefer ha-Zikkaron*, p. 84.

[49]Compare R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon's remark in his *Migdal Oz* on Tefilin, III, 5: ואני תמיה על מעלת רבינו ז״ל שהיה מקובל בנסתרות איש מפי איש, איך בא להכריע בסברא, דברים שהם כבשונו של עולם. Even a Kabbalist who was convinced that Maimonides received esoteric traditions orally was aware that he innovated issues, using his speculative faculty. esoteric traditions orally was aware that he innovated issues, using his speculative faculty.

[50]Scholem, *Les origines*, pp. 273-274.

the role of commandments. At least one of the first Kabbalists criticized Maimonides in the introduction to his *Commentary on Ta'ame ha-Miẓvot*—R. Menachem of Recanati indicates that the Jewish philosophers:[51]

> ...have no part and heritage whatsoever in the secrets of the Torah and the secrets of our Sages, and it would be better to refrain from [dealing with] the commandments and the homilies[52] [of the Sages] rather than speaking about them, distorting their [authentic] meaning and proposing a rationale for them with which even the children are acquainted. Look at the third part of the Guide and you will know their [the philosophers'] issues. And if that wisdom is a wisdom, know indeed and explicitly that it [the philosophy] is not the wisdom of our Torah, since they did not believe except in the matters which they derived by logical demonstation, and they interpreted all the *Sitre Torah* according to the Greek wisdom and the *Merkavah*[53] came up and went out of Egypt.

Jewish philosophers in general, and Maimonides in particular, distorted the traditional esoteric issues by interpreting them according to the Greek philosophy.[54] The secrets of the Jews were presented as if stemming from alien sources—referred to as "Egypt." Moreover, the *Merkavah* is mentioned again in a context which evidently deals with the meaning of the commandments. As we have seen above, Recanati explicitly connects the rationales of the commandments with the *Merkavah* and, therefore, we have here a clear

[51]Printed in R. Jehudah Ḥayyat's *Minḥat Jehudah* in *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua, 1558), fol. 35a: דע באמת כי אין להם בסודות התורה ובסתרי רז״ל חלק ונחלה כלל וטוב היה להניח המצוות והדרשו׳ ושלא לדבר בהם כלל, מלהתריא אותם מכונתם ולתת טעם בהם שאפילו תינוקות של בית רבן יודעין אותו. ועיין בחלק השלישי מספר מורה הנבוכים ואז תדע ענינם. ואם החכמה ההיא חכמה, דע באמת ובברור שאינה חכמת תורתנו, שאינם מאמינים אלא בדבר שבא אליהם במופת וכל סתרי התורה דרשו בחכמה יונית ותעלה ותצא מרכבה ממצרים. Compare also R. Isaac of Acre, *Meirat Einayim*, ed. Amos Goldreich (Ph.D. Thesis, Jerusalem, 1982), p. 157: ואם דחק עצמו רבי׳ משה בר׳ מימון ז״ל בטעם הקרבנות במורה לומ׳ מה שאמ׳ דברים שאין להם יסוד כאשר הוכיח הרמב״ן ז״ל....מ״מ בטעמי המצות לא אמר דבר מספיק כלל אלא כמי שדוחה בקש. See also D. Matt, "The Mystic and the Miẓvot," in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality* (New York, 1986), pp. 380-381.

[52]"Derashot." Recanati uses this term with the connotation of "Aggadot"; cf. his Commentary on *Ta'ame ha-Miẓvot*, ed. Ch. Lieberman, fol. 72a: "ואמר החכם ר׳ עזריאל בפי׳ הדרשות שחבר במסכת תעניות"

[53]See I Kings, 10,29.

[54]Compare Recanati's assertion that issues connected to the words of prayer and *Ma'aseh Merkavah* are rejected by philosophers: *Commentary on Prayer*, Ms. New York, JTS, 1887, fol. 156b. Immediately afterwards (fol. 157a), he attacks Maimonides himself. See also Basilea's *Emunat Ḥakhamim*, fol. 19b, where he attacks the philosophers who: ואינן נותנים דעתם רק ללמוד ספרי חכמי האומות פילוסופיאה וטבעי הכוכבים וחזו מעשה מרכבה שלא הניח ריב״ז, וזה באמת אבדון ומות וכל האומר כן נבדל מקהל הגולה ואין לו עסק במצות. Again, the misinterpretation of the *Merkavah* in Aristotelian vein has a repercussion upon the commandments!

instance of criticism of the Maimonidean view of commandments based upon the rejection of the philosophical conception of the *Merkavah* as stemming from external sources.

Is it sheer coincidence that the vast body of Kabbalistic literature dealing with *Ta'ame ha-Miẓvot* flourished in the hundred years following Maimonides' attempt to propose rationales, which were conceived by Kabbalists as being innovations?

Let us examine a Kabbalistic explanation to a peculiar commandment: the sacrifice. The first discussion of this issue is found in the *Bahir*[55] which conceives the root "Krv," whence stems the term "Korban" as referring to the act of causing the unification of the "holy forms," a term meaning divine potencies—therefore, an explicit theurgical explanation which conceives human activity, sacrifice, as being capable of causing changes in the Supernatural realm. As far as I could examine the modern studies, no scholar assumed that this proposal is an anti-Maimonistic reaction of invention. Moreover, one scholar, Isaac Baer, surmised that the background of this perception is ancient.[56] The view of the *Bahir*, or its sources, was accepted by the first Kabbalists;[57] however, one the very earliest, R. Ezra of Gerone, had already presented his view on the subject in a manner which, as we can easily perceive, has a polemic tone:[58]

> You must know the rationale of the sacrifice offered by Adam and [then] there was not idolatry yet and this rationale is known in the words of our Sages, dispersed amidst the words of the Talmud, and I shall collect[59] them and I shall sow them here.

[55]Compare ed. R. Margaliot, paras. 108-109.

[56]"The Service of Sacrifice in Second Temple Times," *Zion* XL (1975) 142-150, esp. p. 150 n.141 (Hebrew).

[57]See Isaiah Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, II, pp. 196-197; Georges Vajda, *Le Commentaire d'Ezra de Gerone sur le Cantique des Cantiques* (Paris, 1969), pp. 381-424.

[58]Ms. Vatican 294, fol. 39b (quoted by Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, p. 196): יש לך לדעת טעם הקרבן שהקריב אדם הראשון ועדיין לא היה עבודה זרה בעולם, וטעם זה ידוע בדברי רז"ל מפחר בין דבריהם בתלמוד אלקטם ואזרעם פה. See also R. Jehudah ben Yakar's assertion in his *Commentary on Prayers* (Jerusalem, 1979), II, p. 25: ...למוד אגדה ומתוך כך אתה מכירו לפי שיש בהם בכמה מקומות סתרי סתרים חו מגלה קצת חו מגלה קצת ואילך אז תבין. and compare also to R. Todros Abulafia's *Oẓar ha-Kavod*, fol. 25d: שעל דרך האמת לפי הקבלה הנכונה ולפי מדרשי רז"ל המפורדים המפורדים האמורים בחכמה ובתבונה ובדעת. See also Abraham Abulafia's epistle, *Sheva Netivot ha-Torah* in A. Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1854), I, p. 8: משכני סתרי [דרשות חגדות] שכבר יגלה לכל משכיל שהם התורה ואהלי סדות הנבואה.

[59]According to another Ms. Vatican, 441, fol. 27a, the version is: "ואקבצם הנה." See Isaiah Tishby, *Studies in Kabbalah and its Branches* (Jerusalem, 1982), I, p. 31. See also Tishby's discussion (pp. 32-34) on R. Ezra's perception of Midrashim as including esoteric motifs.

As Tishby correctly indicated, R. Ezra is interested in contradicting Maimonides' conception of Jewish sacrifice as conditioned by the existence of idolatry in the geographical area in which the people of Israel lived.[60] However, he perceives the Kabbalistic explanations as attempts to refute and contradict the rationalistic explanations by offering "a novel insight" regarding the sacramental significance of the sacrifice.[61] R. Ezra himself, however, indicates that his explanation is found already in the Sages.[62] The sources used by this Kabbalist immediately afterwards are the *Bahir* and Midrashic discussions. Therefore, he is correct when he asserts that he "collects" materials extant in classical texts in order to disprove Maimonides' view. The polemic remark also includes the rationale of his activity; he collected passages which helped him to present the authentic theurgical view found in reliable sources as opposed to the conception of Maimonides. More poignant are the criticisms of Naḥmanides[63] and R. Todros ha-Levi Abulafia;[64] the latter bluntly asserts, after exposing the Kabbalistic rationale of the sacrifice:

> Behold conspicuous evidence and a valid rationale which is intended to fill with stones the mouths of the arrogants and of those who invented rationales of commandments arbitrarily, like that great man in Torah and wisdom who wrote...and the rationale of the sacrifice is that they were accustomed to sacrifice to idols...and the proof is that Adam offered a sacrifice, and what idolatry existed in his days?

Therefore, the early Kabbalists did not invent the theurgical doctrine of sacrifice they proposed against Maimonides' historical explanation; they only elaborated upon an already existing view and proposed more detailed formu-

[60]See Tishby, ibid., pp. 195-196.

[61]Ibid., pp. 196-197.

[62]See Ms. Vatican, 294, fols. 39b-40b, where he quotes verbatim the *Bahir* and *Midrash Rabba on Shir ha-Shirim* and *Ba-Midbar* concerning the rationale of sacrifices. Tishby (ibid.) did not discuss these sources for R. Ezra's view.

[63]See Commentary on Genesis IV,4: הבינו האנשים האלה [קין והבל] סדר גדול מהקרבנות החנוחות וכן נח ורבותינו אמרו (חולין ס,ע"א) שגם אדם הראשון הקריב שור פר. וזה יחסום פי המבהילים בטעם הקרבנות ועוד ארמוז בו עיקר גדול. Compare also his Commentary on Leviticus I,9, and compare Amos Funkenstein, "Naḥmanides' Symbolical Reading of History" in J. Dan and F. Talmage, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 146 n.20, who states that Naḥmanides' view of sacrifice is proposed in opposition to that of Maimonides.

[64]*Oẓar ha-Kavod* (Varshaw, 1879), fol. 10a: הא לך ראיה ברורה וטעם נכון למלאות חצץ פי הדוברים עתק, הבדים מלבם טעמים למצות כאותו אדם גדול בתורה ובחכמה שכתב....וטעם הקרבנות לפי שהיו רגילין בהן לשם ע"ג...והרי אדם הראשון הקריב קרבן ומה ע"ג היתה בימי האדם הראשון....הא למדה (!) שמימי אדם הראשון היה סדר הקרבנות ידוע אצלם קדם שתהיה ע"ג בעולם וקדם מתן תורה...ולא כדברי המהבילים. הנה נתתי בידך עיקרים גדולים ועצומים וגליתי לך סתרים סתומים וחתומים. Compare also R. Isaac of Acre's passage adduced above, n.51. R. Todros' passage was quoted already by Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, II, p. 196 n.6, and Vajda, *Le Commentaire*, p. 423 n.178.

lations, keeping in mind the controversy they were compelled to hold with the philosophical views.

It is worthwhile to summarize the thesis which I essayed to advance above: the emergence of the historical Kabbalistic texts in Provence and Spain is partially an answer given by Jewish theologians who were in possession of older esoteric traditions to the assertion of Maimonides that Jewish esotericism constitutes rationalistic truths. In my opinion, it is highly improbable that the fact that the first historical Kabbalist, R. Abrahm ben David, was also a critic of Maimonides is merely accidental. Maimonides' systematic works, which imply that Jewish esoteric traditions were lost and that he rediscovered them, forced the Kabbalists to crystallize the pieces of esoteric traditions found in their hands and to formulate them into a more comprehensive system. This system, which is generally a theosophical-theurgical interpretation of Jewish classical sources, never accepted the Maimonidean theology or conception of commandments, and classical Kabbalistic works such as R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov's *Sefer ha-Emunot* or R. Meir ibn Gabbai's *Avodat ha-Kodesh*[65] are explicit polemics against Maimonides, full of criticism that indicates not only the incompatibility of philosophy with Kabbalah, but also the incompatibility between the former and Jewish tradition in general. Most of the Kabbalists conceived Kabbalah as an ancient tradition, while Maimonides' theological system was viewed as an innovation, influenced by foreign sources.

In this context, it may be pertinent to remind ourselves that the reaction to Maimonides' theology could be precipitated also by the prior acquaintance of the first Kabbalists with the Aristotelian philosophy as a pernicious type of thought as presented in R. Jehudah ha-Levi's *Kuzari*. The latter's criticism of medieval Aristotelianism could contribute to what I surmise was a relatively prompt reaction to Maimonides' theology, whose affinities with Aristotelianism were unmistakable to anyone who was familiar with ha-Levi's presentation of philosophy. Since his views were influential among the first Kabbalists, we may assume that their attitude toward the ideas criticized by ha-Levi was also negative.[66]

[65]Compare the formulations of R. Shem Tov, *Sefer ha-Emunot*, fol. 14b: ואם כן החלימו [צ"ל החליטו] לרב שאלו הדעות המקובלות כי הוא לא קבלם משום מקובל, אלא שדיק בדרכי הכופרים בתורת משה רבינו עליו השלום...שמלאם לבם לחקור על הנפלאות כפי דעתם. Cf. also fol. 12b and *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, III, 1, fol. 59ab, etc.

[66]On Ha-Levi's influence on the emerging Kabbalah, see Scholem, *Les origines*, index s.v. Juda Halevi; Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, pp. 275-276, 280.

Interestingly enough, at the time Kabbalah made its first steps as an historical movement, Aristotle—who was opposed by most of the first Kabbalists—was condemned by the Church. See Etienne Gilson, *La philosophie au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Payot, 1947), II, pp. 386-390.

III

It is important to stress that even some full-fledged Kabbalists such as R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon, or R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov openly recognized Maimonides' grandeur as halakhist, and the latter's description of *Mishneh Torah* expressed the highest admiration possible.[67] It is no wonder that Spain was the home of the legend that Maimonides had rejected his philosophical views in favor of Kabbalah.[68] The fascination which the grandeur of his halakhic work exercised was stronger than the historical truth, and converting the great adversary into a Kabbalist was a temptation which Kabbalists could not resist.[69] The legendary conversion of Maimonides has already been described by Scholem in detail, and no significant finding has been noted since his paper. I should like to stress only one pertinent facet of these legends: Maimonides is portrayed not solely as a person who accepted Kabbalistic ideas but also as someone who rejected his former philosophical views.[70] His rejection of philosophy is, in my opinion, insinuated in the anonymous source quoted by ibn Gabbai; however, Maimonides is explicitly reported in the text used by R. Elia of Genazano as having regretted writing the rationales of the commandments in the Guide.[71] The mention of the rationales is highly significant. The Kabbalists wanted Maimonides in their camp, but he had to revoke his pernicious views; Maimonides was therefore converted by the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalists to Kabbalah by completely denying his intellectual achievements as a philosopher.

I should like to mention here the dialectical relation of R. Hayyim Vital

Are there any connections between the Kabbalistic criticism of the Guide, the Church's interdiction to study Aristotle, and the burning of the Guide in Montpellier, as reported by R. Hillel of Verona? See Silver, *Maimonidean Criticism*, pp. 16-17. Whatever the answer could be, it seems to me that J. L. Teicher's thesis that the Maimonidean controversy was the result of Jews' internalization of Christian critique of Maimonides is farfetched. See "Christian Theology and the Jewish Opposition to Maimonides," *Journal of Theological Studies* XLIII (1942) 68-76, esp. 70, 76.

[67]See *Sefer ha-Emunot*, fols. 5a, 10b.

[68]See ibn Gaon's *Migdal Oz*, Hilkhot Yesode Torah, ch. I, and Scholem, "Mi-Ḥoker le-Mekkubal," p. 92.

[69]"Mi-Ḥoker le-Mekkubal"; see also Joseph Dan, "Kovez Ma'asiot be-Ketav Yad 'al ha-Rambam," *Sinai* 75 (1974) 112-118 (Hebrew); Michael E. Shmidman, "On Maimonides' 'Conversion' to Kabbalah" in I. Twersky, ed., *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 375-386.

[70]Scholem, "Mi-Ḥoker le-Mekkubal," p. 95: אמנם לא זכה לזה עד קרוב לאחרית ימיו שכבר חבר כל ספריו הנמצאים היום. and see the whole context in *Avodat ha-Kodesh*, IV, ch. 13, and Scholem's view, ibid., p. 92.

[71]*Iggeret Ḥamudot*, ed. Greenup (London, 1911), p. 4: "כי בסוף ימיו נתחרט ממה שכתב בטעמי המצוות בספר המורה"

toward Maimonides. In one version of *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*,[72] the famous Kabbalist confesses that his soul entered the body of

> R. Aharon ha-Levi, the nephew of R. Zeraḥya ha-Levi, the author of [*Sefer*] *ha-Maor* and afterwards, the [soul] entered [the body of] the Rabbi who was the author of *Maggid Mishneh*, and afterwards [entered] in R. Jehoshua Soriano, and afterwards into the young man mentioned above, and afterwards entered me, nowadays, in the young Hayyim, since there is an affinity and filiation between me and Maimonides and this is the reason why the [author of] *Maggid Mishneh* composed a commentary of Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Yad*.

What is the exact meaning of the phrase "an affinity and filiation" concerning the relation between Vital and Maimonides? This is not clear. The only possible germane evidence is found in the *Responsa* of Vital's contemporary, R. Hayyim Shabbetai, who admiringly refers to R. Vital of Tolosa as "the spark of Maimonides." Maybe the historical consanguinity between these two masters, whatever it may be, as mentioned by Vital, was more than an attempt to discover an honorable "Yihes." It aimed at a more serious issue; shortly before the excerpted passage, Vital wrote:[73]

> Firstly I was the Rabbi R. Vidal de Tolosa, the author of the book *Maggid Mishneh*, and his name is like mine nowadays, and afterward I transmigrated into a person named R. Jehoshua Soriano...and he [i.e., Isaac Luria] said to me that the reason I had to transmigrate now was the fact that in one of the previous metamorphoses of mine, I did not believe very much in the wisdom of the *Zohar*. And from his words I understood that he was referring to my previous metamorphosis as the author of Maggid Mishneh, although he did not wish to reveal the issue. And he [i.e., Luria] told me that in this metamorphosis I need to study the wisdom of the *Zohar* in order to effect repair. And he told me that

[72] *Sefer ha-Gilgul*, Ms. Paris, 1372, fol. 80b = *Sefer ha-Hezionot*, ed. E. A. Aeshkoli (Jerusalem, 1954), p. 137: עד שנתגלגלה בר' אהרן הלוי נכדו של הרי"ז הלוי בעל המאור ואח"כ נתגלגלה בהרב בעל המגיד משנה ואח"כ בר' יאשע סוריאנו ואח"כ בבחור אברהם הנז"ל ואח"כ נתגלגלה בי אני עכשיו הצעיר חיים זא"ל כי יש לי שייכות וקורבה עם הרמב"ם ז"ל ולכן עשה באור המגיד משנה על ספר היד להרמב"ם זלה"ה Compare to Vital's limitation of the Posekim to two figures: Cf. ואלו הן הפוסקי' הר"א נכדו של הרי"ז הלוי הרב בעל מגיד משנה הנקרא דון וויטאל (!) מאליסא *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Vilna, 1886), p. 88; *Sefer ha-Ḥezionot*, p. 146.

[73] Ms. Paris, 1372, fol. 78b-79a; *Sefer ha-Ḥezionot*, 137, pp. 139-140: כי תחלה הייתי אני הרב ר"ר וידאל די טולושא בעל ספר מגיד משנה ונק' שמו כשמי עתה, ואחרי הייתי בגלגול איש אחד ושמו ר' יהושע סוריאנו....וא"ל שמה שהוצרכתי להתגלגל עתה, היה לסבת שבגלגול אחד מן הקודמים אלי, לא הייתי מאמין הרבה בחכמת הזוהר, וכפי דבריו הבנתי שהיה כשהייתי בגלגול מגיד משנה ולא רצה לגלות העניין וא"ל כי הענין שאני צריך לתקן עתה בגלגול זה הוא לעסוק בחכמת הזוהר. וא"ל כי לפי שבהיותי בגלגול בעל מגיד משנה, הייתי מעיין גדול וחריף בחכמת העיון ולכן אינני חפץ עתה לטרוח בחכמת העיון. Compare also fol. 81a.

> since I was a great and penetrating philosopher in the wisdom of philosophy, during my metamorphosis as the author *Maggid Mishne*, now I did not want to occupy myself with the wisdom of philosophy.

Vital's preoccupation with the *Zohar* represents, therefore, the reparation of the sin of rejecting the wisdom of the *Zohar*; Vital understood that this transgression had taken place in his metamorphosis as R. Vidal de Tolosa. The description of this figure as a great philosopher, together with the widespread recognition of him as a leading halakhist,[74] points to a perception of R. Vidal as a spark of Maimonides, also according to R. Hayyim Vital.[75] We may assume that, in repairing Vidal's stubbornness toward Kabbalah, Vital implies something else, namely, a reparation of Maimonides' relation to Kabbalah. This assumption may be strengthened by two facts: a) the apparently curious connection between the fact that R. Vidal commented upon Maimonides' Code and the mention of Vital's kinship to Maimonides may be understood if we suppose that Vidal was perceived by Vital as a metamorphisis of Maimonides. If so, the concentation of Vidal on philosophy, seemingly represented in Vital's eyes the reverberation of Maimonides' interest in philosophy. b) However, what seems to be more important is a presentation of Maimonides which recalls Vital's description of Vidal; in the same version of *Sefer ha-Gilgulim*, the Kabbalist indicates that:[76] "Maimonides stems from the left curl and this is the reason why he was not worthy of knowing the

[74] See, e.g., R. David ben Zimra's high appreciation of R. Vidal as a competent interpreter of the *Code*. Cf. Israel Goldman, *The Life and Times of Rabbi David Ibn Avi Zimra* (New York, 1970), p. 41.

[75] The term "niẓoẓ," "spark" employed by R. Hayyim Shabbetai may well also have a Kabbalistic overtone; this term was a commonplace in the discussions on metamorphoses since early Kabbalah. See, e.g., Gershom Scholem, "Le-Ḥeker Torat ha-Gilgul be-Kabbalah ba-me'ah ha-13," *Tarbiẓ* 16 (1945) 143. On the metamorphoses of Maimonides, see R. Joseph Karo's statement, emended by R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 170.

[76] Ms. Paris, 1372, fol. 74a: "אמנם הרמב"ם הוא מן הפאה השמאלית ולכן לא זכה לידע חכמת הזוהר" Compare to the diametrically opposed view of R. Isaac Yehiel Safrin of Komarno, who maintains that, though Naḥmanides did not see the *Zohar*, Maimonides had seen it and was influenced by it in halakhic issues as well as others. See *Netiv Miẓvotekhah* (New York, 1970), p. 101: והרמב"ן לא זכה לראותו...ולכן בכמה מקומות כתב היפך דברי הזוהר והרמב"ם נראה מדבריו בכמה הלכות ענינים שראה אותו בהדאי

[77] Seemingly the curls of *Zeir Anpin*. Compare the parallel text found in the other version of *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Vilna, 1886), p. 142: "והרמב"ם מפאה השמאלי' שהוא כלו דין ולכן לא עסק בחכמ' זו" According to another version, Maimonides was unable to comprehend Kabbalah: "שהוא כולו דין ולכן לא היה יכול להשיג בזאת החכמה" *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* (Presmisle, 1875), part. II, fol. 8a. The characterization of Maimonides as connected with the left side, since it is the side of stern judgment, may also be connected to his stringency in matters of halakhah; see Isadore Twersky, "R. Yosef

wisdom of the *Zohar*." The phrase "wisdom of the *Zohar*," referring here to Maimonides, is the very same expression used by Vital when dealing with Vidal's rejection of the Kabbalah. Is this a mere coincidence? It seems to me that this is very improbable. In my view, both Maimonides' ignorance of the Kabbalah and Vidal's explicit rejection of this lore are repaired by Vital. The study of philosophy was regarded by Vital as a sin, which can be atoned solely by the total concentation on the study of the *Zohar*.

I indulged in these philological exercises in order to reconstruct what seems to me to be an inner conviction of one of the greatest Kabbalists—Vital's self-perception of his Kabbalistic activity as amending the sin of the philosophers: Maimonides and Vidal. This exercise is worthwile since it enables us to comprehend better a historical process which found its imaginative expression in Vital's conception; Kabbalah, mostly the *Zohar*, is the compensation for the importance which was bestowed on philosophy by leading Jewish figures.[78] Furthermore, Vital's assertion that he is the person whose task is to atone for the success of philosophy includes a valuable historical insight: Vital was indeed instrumental in the process of dissemination of Kabbalah, which became the dominant Jewish theology, partially due to Vital's literary activity.

IV

Maimonides and Ecstatic Kabbalah

Our description of Maimonides' view of *Sitre Torah* as a negative catalyzer which compelled the Kabbalists to formulate their traditions in a more articulated manner is, however, only one important facet of the relations between them and the great theologian. We have surveyed only the general

Ashkenazi ve-Sefer Mishne Torah la-Rambam" in S. Lieberman, ed., *Salo W. Baron Jubilee Volume* (Jerusalem, 1975, Hebrew section), p. 194.

Compare, however, the high appreciation of Maimonides—together with another Moses: "Kordovero"—at the end of R. Shabbetay Horowitz' introduction to *Shefa Tal* (Jerusalem, 1971), fol. 9c-d. In his eyes, "from Moses (ben Maimon) to Moses (Kordovero) there was no Moses," and the importance of the former is explicitly connected with Maimonides' being a master in religious (בהוראה דתי תורני) matters, as well as divine philosophy (פלטופיא אלהית); and compare below R. Isaac of Acre's view, n.145.

[78]See already Adolf Jellinek's view that R. Moses de Leon's works and the *Zohar* were directed against rationalistic tendencies; see his *Moses de Leon und sein Verhaeltnis zum Sohar* (Leipzig, 1851), p. 21. Israel Zinberg, *Toledot Sifrut Israel* (Merhavia —Tel Aviv, 1960), 2, pp. 58-61 = *A History of Jewish Literature*, tr. Bernard Martin (Cleveland and London, 1973), 3, pp. 55-59. Scholem even went so far as to assert that Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed" was in almost every respect the antithesis of the *Zohar* in his *Zohar—The Book of Splendor* (New York, 1974), p. 7.

attitude of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, whose religious mentality profoundly differed from that of Maimonides. However, another type of Kabbalah presented an entirely different intellectual structure and a significantly different relation to Maimonides. I am referring here to the ecstatic Kabbalah as it appeared since the writings of R. Abraham Abulafia. Before discussing his contribution to the infiltration of Maimonidean thought into Kabbalah, a short remark on the prehistory of this type of mysticism. Mystical linguistic techniques have been known among Jews since the *Hekhalot* literature. There is some evidence that they were employed de facto by the Ashkenazi Hassidim as late as the beginning of the thirteenth century. In the middle of that century, we know that in the circle of the Kabbalists, R. Jacob ben Jacob ha-Kohen and his brother R. Isaac and R. Moses of Burgos, linguistic techniques were related to ecstatic experiences. The written documents belonging to this Kabbalistic trend are scanty, and most of them are extant only in manuscript form which remain unstudied. A prima facie perusal of this material shows that philosophical terminology plays only a marginal role. It is this Kabbalah that Abraham Abulafia met around 1270. He explicitly recognized the influence of German Hassidic writings as well as that of some Spanish commentaries on *Sefer Yeẓirah*. However, years before he became acquainted with this linguistic Kabbalah, Abulafia studied the Guide. His studies of the Guide seemingly had a deep influence upon his thought, and their traces remained evident long after he embraced the Kabbalah. Therefore, Abulafia's studies of Kabbalistic material represent a transition from the philosophic stage in his formation to a mystical one. A similar intellectual evolution seems, however, to be characteristic for some of his contemporaries. As I. Twersky has already pointed out, R. Isaac ibn Latif, R. Moses de Leon and R. Joseph Gikatilla underwent a similar process;[79] although acquainted with Maimonides' Guide earlier, they gradually separated from his conception, approaching various types of theosophy. The spiritual metamorphosis of the anonymous Kabbalist who authored the work *Sha'are Zedek*, written in the vein of Abulafia's Kabbalah, is very illuminating for our subject. He confessed that he was disappointed with the Maimonidean philosophy and became an ecstatic Kabbalist.[80] At least two of them, Gikatilla and de Leon, were, at an early stage, close to the linguistic Kabbalah, as is shown by the content of their works. However, already at this early stage of their intellectual development the Maimonidean thought had

[79]See "Religion and Law" in S. D. Goitein, ed., *Religion in a Religious Age* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 74; Zinberg, *Toledot*, pp. 34-35, 347 n.1.

[80]See Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 148-149. The intellectual adventure of this Kabbalist is strikingly reminiscent of Abulafia's himself; both were wanderers who left philosophy for mysticism. See below n.94 in the text of the anonymous Kabbalist which is similar in several ways to Abulafia's autobiography.

lost its centrality, and in de Leon's *Or Zarua* its influence was no more than marginal. It was only in Abulafia's own Kabbalah that a strong tendency of Maimonidean thought remained constant and dominant. This difference between the later attitude to Maimonides on the part of the most important Kabbalists in the late thirteenth century may be a matter of chance, being the result of idiosyncratic intellectual formation. However, it seems that the difference may have been the result of historical circumstances. Gikatilla and de Leon remained in Spain, and their change of mind toward the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah must be explained as an influence exercised by other Kabbalists such as R. Moses of Burgos, who presumably introduced them to new areas of Kabbalistic lore. During the period that this change was taking place, Abulafia was far from Spain, roaming between Greece, Italy and Sicily. The separation of this Kabbalist from the centers of theosophical Kabbalah— Catalonia and Castilia—contributed to the preservation of Abulafia's prior cultural education: Maimonides' Guide and linguistic Kabbalah. These two different types of thought were the main sources of Abulafia's synthesis whence the ecstatic Kabbalah emerged. Linguistic Kabbalah waned rapidly in Spain, and its traces can be detected only sporadically at the end of the thirteenth century in Europe. In Abulafia's works, and in those of his disciples, it became a central factor in Jewish mysticism.

Hence the great divergences between the Abulafian type of Kabbalah, as it was developed in Italy—almost all his important works were written on Italian soil—and the main Kabbalistic conceptions as they crystallized in the Spanish Kabbalah in the writings of Abulafia's contemporary Kabbalists. Thus, the differences between two main branches of Kabbalah as they were formulated in the eighties of the thirteenth century are related, inter alia, also to the contradicting attitudes toward Maimonides. In my opinion, the positive apperception of the Guide generally reflects an affinity to ecstatic Kabbalah, whereas the negative view of this work is prevalent among the Spanish Kabbalists. The latter can be regarded fairly as continuing the controversy against Maimonides' work in a rather subtle way. No more open clashes, condemnations or banishments, but a strenuous effort to build up the alternative, an effort which reached its peak with the emergence of the Lurianic system, which was an important factor in the already existing process of the descent of the Maimonidean impact.

I should like, at this point, to focus upon the integration of Maimonides' philosophy with ecstatic Kabbalah and its contribution to Jewish mysticism in general. The frictions between this type of Kabbalah and Maimonides' thought were minimal; with the exception of Maimonides' conception of the Hebrew language as being conventional, Abulafia the Kabbalist was ready to accept most of the principles of Maimonides' religious outlook. At present, I shall summarize the attitude of Abulafia toward Maimonides and only afterwards the conceptual influence of the philosopher upon the Kabbalist.

In a highly significant passage, Abulafia confesses that no study of texts caused him to reach the level of prophecy but rather the practical application of the Kabbalah concerning the Divine Name. His enumeration of the texts he studied seemed to convey not only biographical details, but also Abulafia's estimation of the importance of these texts:[81]

> I know out of examination and experience[82] that everything I knew from the ways of the books of the prophets, according to their plain meaning and their commentary, and the parables of their legends and homilies, and what I learned from the Talmud, and even the paucity of what I learned from the books of philosophers[83] and what I knew from the study of the Guide[84] and what I received regarding the Secrets of the [Divine] names written in the *Chapters* of R. Ishmael,[85] the *Alphabeta* of R. Akiba, the *Book of Secrets* and the *Book of Raziel*[86] and the *Book of the Supernatural and Terrestrial Guards* and the *Book of Bahir* and the *Book of Yeẓirah* itself, all this [study] did not cause me to reach the comprehension of the Agent Intellect.

The Guide stands in this curriculum after the traditional studies and the philosophical education and before the initiation into Kabbalistic lore; this intermediary position of the Guide can be understood to mean two somewhat differing things: this book belongs mostly to the prior phase, as against Kabbalistic learning; or it is indeed an intermediary phase, including specula-

[81] *Sheva Netivot ha-Torah*, ed. Adolph Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1854), Erstes Heft, p. 21: ואני יודע מצד הבחינה והנסיון שכל מה שידעתי מדרכי ספרי הנביאים כפשוטם ובפירושם ובמשלי אגדותיהם ומדרשיהם ומה שלמדתי מספרי חכמי הפילוסופים ומה שידעתי מלמוד המורה ומה שקבלתי מספרי השמות הכתובים בפרקי ר' ישמעאל באותיות דר' עקיבה ובס' הרזים ובספר רזיאל ובספר משמרות העליונים והתחתונים ובספר הבהיר ובס' יצירה עצמו, כל זה לא הביאתני לידי השגת השכל הפועל.

[82] On these words, see below, n.124.

[83] Compare "Ve-Zot li-Yihudah," ed. Adolph Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik* (Leipzig, 1853), Erstes Heft, p. 18: "ולמדתי הגיון וחכמת הטבע וקצת הלמודים בלי עמקה"

[84] Ibid., p. 18: "ולמדתי המורה הנקרא מורה הנבוכים בעומקה מופלאה עם סתריו"

[85] A similar list of ancient Jewish texts, probably studied by Abulafia, is found in his *Oẓar Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, 1580, fol. 49b: ואמנם כתבתי כל זה בזה החיבור כדי לסתום פי המכחישי' דרכי צירוף האותיות תעניניהם ומלעיגים על כל מה שבא מזה באותיות דר' עקיבא ובספר הבהיר ובספר השמוש הנקרא שימוש תורה ושמוש תילים מצירוף השמות ומהוצאתם ממקומות ידועים, ומפרקי היכלות דר' ישמעאל. A similar list is found also in Abulafia's *Or ha-Sekhel*; the recurrence of the ancient mystical-magical literature as a superior layer of study is important, since it demonstrates that even the most Maimonidean of the Kabbalists runs against the intent of Maimonides, to disentangle his thought from the prior Jewish mystical-magical literature.

[86] The distinction between these two titles is a question which must be discussed elsewhere.

tive elements as well as Kabbalistic ones. I should like to elaborate upon the second interpretation which points to a perception of the Guide as a partially Kabbalistic work. The followers of Maimonides, Abulafia asserts, distorted his teachings, attributing heretical concepts to him; however, the damage they caused affected:[88]

> neither him [i.e., Maimonides] nor those who received [their knowledge] from the real essence of the teachings of the theologian's works, since he and they saved their souls and it is sufficient to him and to them that his intention and theirs are identical. And I am the insignificant student who received from this book, according to my perfect masters ז״ל

Therefore, Abulafia proposes a phenomenology of studying the Guide a) in his own way, based upon a transmission of the secret intentions of Maimonides. When describing this tradition, Abulafia uses the terms "Mekubbal" and "Mekubbalim," which are conspicuous references to his own type of esotericism; b) in the way of the followers of Maimonides who arbitrarily attribute to the master their preconceptions, whose influence was pernicious.[89]

The authentic Maimonides, therefore, is not the misinterpreted master of the philosophers, but the source of the oral tradition which reached Abulafia. The detailed content of this tradition was exposed in the three commentaries on the Guide's secrets, which Abulafia composed. This phenomenon is exceptional even among ardent Maimonidean thinkers; none of them can be compared with Abulafia as far as the number of commentaries are concerned. However, even more exceptional is the inner structure of Abulafia's commentaries; in contrast to the common linear interpretation of the Guide, the

[87]Unknown title.

[88]*Sefer Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*, Ms. München, 408, fol. 47a: ונשאר הנזק כולו עמם לא עמו ז״ל ולא עם המקובלים מאמתת מאמרי ספרי האלהי כי הוא הם נפשם הצילו הי לו ולהם בזה שכוונתו וכונתם דבר אחד. ואני התלמיד הקטן, המקובל מספרו על פי רבותי השלמים ז״ל.... It is worth remarking that the phrase "המקובל מספרו" stands for one of the three types of Kabbalah Abulafia deemed he has received: from masters, from book, from G-d. See his *Sefer ha-Ḥeshek*, Ms. New York, JTS, 1801, fol. 4b and n.128 below. It is highly significant that a somewhat close attitude toward Maimonidean students is to be found also in one of R. Samuel ibn Tibbon's works, his *Commentary on the Ecclesiastes*. According to him, even the disciplines of Maimonides did not fathom his recondite opinion and distorted his thought so as to be consonant with "their wishes and with the opinions which had been instilled in their hearts....They partly transformed what [Maimonides] said so that his words become tolerable to them." See Ravitzky, "Samuel ibn Tibbon and the Guide," pp. 89-90.

[89]Ms. München, 408, fol. 47a: אבל הם דט דינין בתחלת המחשבה וטעו והטעו זולתם בדעתם הרעה וכאילו נראה הוא ואע״פ שאיט כן באמת שהם הזיקו שם הרב והם לא התעילו עצמם בזה. The whole context is worthy of an elaborate discussion mainly because of its resemblance to R. Joseph Caspi's view in his *Commentary on Proverbs*, 1, 3, ed. Isaac Last, *'Asarah Kele Kesef* (Presburg, 1903), pp. 19-20.

Kabbalist built up his works around the secrets of the Guide, ignoring the continuous textual analysis which was adopted later on by all the other commentators. Abulafia was interested in:[90] "the secrets existing in the book [i.e., the Guide] according to what we have received from the mouths of the wise men of [this] generation, our masters, may God keep them alive."

"The secrets" Abulafia inherited from his masters are enumerated in his commentaries. All three include the same thirty-six secrets, always arranged in exactly the same order. I have no idea who exactly Abulafia's masters are who transmitted the list of secrets to him; the single known teacher of Abulafia who was mentioned by him as his teacher of the Guide was R. Hillel of Verone, but nowhere did R. Hillel refer to an oral tradition concerning thirty-six secrets hinted at in the Guide. Nevertheless, I assume that Abulafia's assertions that such a tradition existed and reached him is to be accepted as reliable.[91] His indications are seemingly corroborated by two other pieces of information. He indicated, in an autobiographical passage, that[92] "I studied the Guide, named the *Guide to the Perplexed*, which is a real guide, with a wondrous profoundness, together with its secrets." Therefore, the secrets may be seen as an additional layer of the study of the Guide. The

[90]*Sefer Sitre Torah*, Ms. Paris, B.N., 774, fol. 117a: כלל הסתרות הנמצאים בספר כפי מה שקבלתם מפי חכמי הדור רבותי ה׳ יחיים. See also ibid., fol. 163b: ועל כן אכתוב לך כל דבר הדבר מראש ועד סוף כפי מה שקיבלתיהו גם אני מן המוסרים ראשי הפרקים. Compare this view of Abulafia to that of his younger contemporary, R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, who asserts, in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah* (erroneously printed under the name of Ra'avad): ...חר״מ ז״ל ומי קם בגאונים כמוהו. אמנם כל דבריו בראשי פרקים מובנים למי שקיבל סודותיו מפה אל פה. From the context, the "R. M." seems to be Maimonides; see also Georges Vajda, "Un chapitre de l'histoire du conflit entre la Kabbale et la philosophie—La polemique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi de Catalgone," *AHDLMA* 23 (1956) 54, n.1. G. Scholem, "The Real Author of the Commentary on Sefer Yezirah, Attributed to Ra'avad, and his Books," *Kiriat Sefer* IV (1927/28) 289 (Hebrew), pointed out that R. Joseph's statement is meaningful on the background of Abulafia's or Gikatilla's mystical interpretations of the Guide. I should like to add that only Abulafia and R. Joseph share the view that the secrets of the Guide have to be received orally.

On R. Joseph's attitude to Maimonides, see also Moshe Hallamish's preface to *Kabbalistic Commentary of Rabbi Yoseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi on Genesis Rabbah* (Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 21-22, esp. p. 80 (Hebrew).

[91]See also another tradition concerning the Guide, adduced by Abulafia in his commentary *Sitre Torah*, Ms. Paris, 774, fol. 115b: וקבלה יש בידינו ממספר כל הפרקים אשר בכלל חלק...ומספרם גן עד. On the 177 chapters of the Guide, see R. Jospe, "The Number and Division of Chapters in *The Guide of the Perplexed*," in M. Idel, W. Z. Harvey, E. Schweid, eds., Shlomo Pines Jubilee Volume Vol. I (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 833-887.

[92]See the text in n.84 above.

qualification of his studies as "wondrous profoundness" pointed also to a special kind of learning. Moreover, I suppose that another autobiographical excerpt indicates a twofold type of study of the Guide. In his *Oẓar Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia confessed:[93]

> I found there [in Capua] an honorable, wise and discerning philosopher and an expert physician, and his name is R. Hillel ז"ל; and I became a companion of his and I studied under his guidance a little of the wisdom of philosophy, and it immediately became very sweet [i.e., agreeable] to me, and I made efforts, as strongly as I could, to know it, and I meditated upon them (!) day and night, and I could not cool my thoughts from my meditation until I had studied the *Guide of the Perplexed* several times.[94] And I have also taught it in several places: in Capua to four[95] [students], accidentally, but they went on erroneous ways, since they were thoughtless young men, and I left them. And at Thebes[96] [I have] ten [students] and none of them profited, but they spoiled the two ways, the first and the second. In Eurypo[97] four [students] and also there was no one who profited since the thoughts of men are different from each other, *a fortiori* regarding the depths of the wisdom and the *Sitre Torah*, and I did not see one of them who was worthy to deliver to him even the notes of the truth as it is...and at

[93]Ms. Oxford, 1580, fol. 164a-b: מצאתי שם איש נכבד חכם ונבון פילוסוף ורופא מומחה ושמו ר' הלל ז"ל. ואתחברה אתו ואלמוד לפניו מעט מחכמת הפילוסופיאה ומיד נמתקה לי מאד ואשתדל בידיעתה בכל כחי ובכל מאדי ואהגה בם יומם ולילה ולא נתקררה דעתי ממחשבתי עד שלמדתי מורה הנבוכים פעמי' רבות. וגם למדתיו במקומות הרבה בקפואה לארבעה במקרה ויצאו לתרבות רעה, כי נערים בלי מדע ועוזבתים. ובתיבץ עשרה ולא הועיל אחד מהם, אבל הפסידו שני הדרכים הראשון והשני. ובאבריפו ארבעה וגם בם אין מועיל כי הדיעות משונות מאד בבני אדם כ"ש בעמקי החכמה ובסתרי התורה ולא ראיתי בם מי שראוי מהם למסור לו אפי' ראשי פרקים מן האמת כמות שהיא....ובברגוש שנים רב ותלמיד שם הרב ר' משה צינפא ז"ל אדם גדול וחכם נכבד. ושם התלמיד ר' שם טוב, ג"כ בחור נחמד וטוב. אלא שהבחרות מנעו מן הלמוד ולא למד ממנו עמי, כי אם קצת קבלות חיצוניות לא הוא ולא רבו. This text has already been printed several times but always with some errors which I have corrected according to the unique manuscript. See Adolph Jellinek, *Bet Ha-Midrasch* III, pp. XL-XLI; Benzion Dinur, *A Documentary History of the Jewish People*, Second Series, II, Book IV (Tel Aviv, 1969), p. 366 (Hebrew).

[94]Compare to the autobiographical passage of the anonymous Kabbalist who wrote *Sha'are Ẓedek*, Ms. Jerusalem, 4° 148, fol. 61a-b: זמן לי השם פילוסוף אחד יהודי ולמדתי מעט מדברים הנבוכים והוסיף לי חשק על חשקי שמתי עצמי מעט בחכמו' ההגיון ומעט בחכמת הטבע ונמתקה לי זאת החכמה מאד

[95]On these four students and Abulafia's changing attitude toward them, see Moshe Idel, "Abraham Abulafia and the Pope," *AJS Review* 7-8 (1982-1983) 3-4 (Hebrew section).

[96]That is the correct reading, not "בתוכן" as in print.

[97]This is the name of an isthmus in Greece; in print, the reading "אצריפו" is erroneous.

> Burgos two [students], a master and [his] student. The name of the master, R. Moshe Chinfa[98] ז"ל, a great man and an honorable scholar. And the name of the student is R. Shem Tov, also a kind and good young man, but his youth prevented him from learning and he did not study it [i.e., the Guide] but only a few external traditions, neither he nor his master.

Therefore, there are at least two ways of studying, the first and the second, which were spoiled by Abulafia's Theban students of the Guide;[99] it seems reasonable that the second way is tantamount to the "depth of the wisdom and the *Sitre Torah*," which were not delivered to the students at Eurypo. Since the latter were supposed to study the Guide with Abulafia, I surmise that he taught them the first, apparently the plain, manner of understanding this work, whereas the more profound way, including the *Sitre Torah*, which are also the notes—"Rashe Perakim"—was withheld from them. As we shall see below, *Sitre Torah* is the name of one of Abulafia's commentaries on the secrets of the Guide; moreover, this peculiar commentary was written especially for the Capuan students who are the only ones whom Abulafia did not disqualify as capable to receive advanced traditions. Therefore, it seems that this way of understanding the Guide was the "second" way "spoiled" by the Thebeans. Likewise, it is probable that the students at Burgos received only the first way or only a few advanced issues regarding the Guide. Abulafia implicitly indicated that there were more advanced traditions. I suppose that those traditions were identical with the thirty-six secrets which constituted the second way and which had been written down for the Theban students in 1280. Moreover, they could be considered to be advanced "Kabbalot," namely, Kabbalistic interpretations of the Guide. This statement may perhaps be strengthened by Abulafia's indication that:[100]

[98]On the name of this Kabbalist, see G. Scholem, *Tarbiẓ* 3 (1932) 260. Abulafia's admirative description of this figure is corroborated by some other contemporary statements. Abulafia's lack of success in persuading R. Moshe of Burgos to accept his Kabbalistic interpretations of the Guide is not surprising; the cultural atmosphere of Castilia was not inclined toward rationalistic thought. Toledo was a center of opposition to Maimonides; the two leading figures of Jewish culture flowering there, R. Meir ha-Levi Abulafia and his grandson, R. Todros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia, attacked the Guide. See, respectively, B. Septimus, *Hispano-Jewish Culture*, pp. 102-103, and above n.64.

[99]These students requested Abulafia to explain to them in writing the secrets of the Guide: עמדו עלי בחן ותחנונים ויבקשו ממנו לפרש סתרות המורה הנבוכים עם קצת סתרי תורה אשר כידינו מענייינים עמוקים מאד. See Idel (n.94 above), p. 4. These students succeeded in obtaining their request; Abulafia composed for them one of his commentaries to the Guide named *Sitre Torah*; I suppose that this work is also referred to as the "second way" by Abulafia.

[100]Ms. Oxford, 1580, fol. 164b: ובמדינת שלום שנים האחד מהם ר' שמואל הנביא שקבל

...in Madinat Shalom[101] two [students], one of them R. Samuel the Prophet,[102] who received from me a few traditions,and the second, R. Joseph Gikatilla[103] יש' שו' מע' and he doubtless succeeded in a wondrous way concerning what he studied under my guidance, and he added much from his strength and knowledge.

If this passage, which comes immediately after the aforecited discussion on the Guide, still deals with Abulafia's dissemination of his way of understanding Maimonides' work, then we may suppose that Gikatilla was a student of Abulafia's in matters regarding the Guide, and he seemingly received more "Kabbalot" than R. Samuel the Prophet. Now, Gikatilla is the only author[104] other than Abulafia who composed a Kabbalistic commentary on some issues found in the Guide.[105] Although this commentary differs in several aspects from Abulafia's commentaries, his affinities to Abulafia's Kabbalah are nevertheless remarkable. From Abulafia's own description, differences are to be expected; Gikatilla was a talented and independent person who immediately progressed rapidly, as could be observed by his master. Let us adduce only one relevant statement made by Gikatilla in his commentary on the Guide. According to the metaphoric interpretation, the terms "temunah" and "tavnit" are true.[106] "However, according to the depth of the secrets of the Kabalah, there are wonders [hinted at in these words]." Therefore, Gikatilla subscribed to a twofold view of the Guide: a metaphoric view which was valid and a more advanced one, a Kabbalistic way, denominated, as with Abulafia, by means of the word "depth" (עומק).[107] Furthermore, in his second manner of interpretation, he quoted:[108] "the great Kabbalists who said in the

קצת ממני קבלות והשני ר' יוסף גקתילא יש' שו' מע' והוא בלא ספק הצליח הצלחה מופלאה במה שלמד לפני והוסיף מכחו ומדעתו הרבה.

[101]I.e., Medina Celi or Celim; see Gikatilla's introduction to *Ginnat Egoz*, fol. 2b; see Isaac F. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Tel Aviv, 1965), p. 506, n.45 (Hebrew).

[102]The same name occurs in texts dealing with "gematria"; see Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 40, n.27. The whole question deserves a detailed discussion.

[103]In Hebrew there are some indecipherable letters.

[104]In this context, I should like to mention the existence of a Kabbalistic interpretation of Maimonides' twenty-five propositions, extant in two manuscripts. Close analysis of it unmistakably evinces that this treatise was written under Abulafia's deep influence.

[105]The problem of authorship of this short commentary was resolved by Gottlieb's analysis; see *Studies*, pp. 110-117.

[106]Printed in *She'elot le-Ḥakham* R. Shaul ha-Kohen (Venice, 1574), fol. 26a: ענין תמונה ותבנית לפי העברת הלשון דברי ר"מ אמת. אבל לפי עומק סתרי הקבלה בהם פלאות.

[107]Compare above, n.84, "בעומקה מופלאה"

[108]Ibid., fol. 26b: "וסוד תמונה אמרו גדולי הקבלה בגמרא [וצ"ל בגימטריא] פרצוף אדם."

Gemara [sic] that 'Temunah' is 'Parẓuf Adam'." I suppose that the term "Gemara" is an error for "gematria," since "temunah" has the same numerical value as "Parẓuf Adam." I am not sure at all if Gikatilla alluded to others here or only to Abulafia; he, after all, spoke in the plural.[109] However, we cannot ignore the fact that Abulafia used this very *gematria* in one of his own commentaries on the Guide and referred to it in a very special manner:[110] "...and let God forgive me for what I shall reveal of that matter, whose secret is *temunah* and its meaning is *Parẓuf Adam.*"

This very strange emphasis on the esoteric character of this *gematria* only shows that Abulafia considered it, like Gikatilla, to be an important issue. Moreover, the fact that "gematria" is part of Gikatilla's interpretation of the Guide according to the Kabbalah evinces a clear affinity to Abulafia's own way.

As Ephraim Gottlieb has already noted, Gikatilla was immersed in the linguistic Kabbalah at the time he met Abulafia.[111] This statement, which was adopted by other scholars as well,[112] opens the question as to what Abulafia taught Gikatilla if the latter was already well acquainted with linguistic Kabbalah. Gikatilla referred to him as "the teacher of intellectual [things]."[113] Therefore, I suppose that we may consider Abulafia as a teacher of Gikatilla in matters of the Guide, the latter having been Abulafia's most successful student and, indeed, the single person who kabbalistically interpreted the Guide.

Let us return to the initial question. Abulafia remarked twice that he had

[109]Namely, 500 or 501. This gematria already occurred in R. El'azar of Worms' works. See "Sefer Sha'are ha-Sod, ha-Yehud veha-Emunah," ed. J. Dan, *Temirin*, ed. I. Weinstock (Jerusalem, 1979), I, p. 146: "ותמונה בגימטריא פרצוף אדם," and the editor's note 103 has to be corrected since the gematria is 500-501. See also Naḥmanides, *Kitve ha-Ramban*, I, p. 346.

[110]*Sitre Torah*, Ms. Paris, 774, fol. 165b: השם ימחול לי מה שאגלה ממנו והוא שסודו התמונה ועניינה פרצוף האדם Compare also his Commentary on his own prophetic work, *Ish Adam*, Ms. Roma-Angelica, 38, fol. 1b: "חי תמונה רק זה סתרו כי ראה גתוכו פרצוף אדם חי."

[111]*Studies*, p. 105.

[112]See Asi Farber, "A New Fragment from the Introduction by Joseph Gikatilla to Ginnat Egoz," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* I (1981) 159-160 n.5 (Hebrew); Shlomo Blickstein, "Between Philosophy and Mysticism, a Study of the Philosophical-Qabbalistic Writings of Joesph Giqatila" (Ph.D. Thesis, JTS, New York, 1983), pp. 111ff.

[113]Cf. the text adduced by Gottlieb, *Studies*, p. 104: "מורה השכליות ר' אברהם נר"ו." On Gikatilla's relation to Maimonides in general, see M. Ch. Weiler, "Inquiries in the Kabbalistic Terminology of R. Joseph Gikatilla and his Attitude to Maimonides," *HUCA* 37 (1966) 13-14 (Hebrew).

received the list of the secrets of the Guide, and I assume that this is a trustworthy assertion which fits into his account of the attempt to teach the Guide according to two ways. The first one may concern a linear interpretation of the text; the second one presumably deals with the discrete secrets as secrets found in the various chapters of the Guide, in the fashion proposed by Abulafia in his commentaries on this work. The first one was similar to the common method, also adopted by the philosophers, referred to in the passage excerpted above from *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*; the second, again according to the same source, was based upon secrets transmitted through a line of transmitters.

This perception of the Guide renders it a Kabbalistic work. We can regard the intermediary position of Maimonides' work between philosophy and purely "Kabbalistic" works as seen in the quotation from *Sheva Netivot ha-Torah*, reflecting the two perceptions of the Guide: according to the plain meaning, it is philosophic; for "advanced" people who received its secrets, it is Kabbalistic. Before elaborating upon the significance of the last statement, I should like to point out the diametrically opposite attitudes toward the Guide which were found in theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah versus that in ecstatic Kabbalah. For the former, the Guide was a suspect work whose implications were more dangerous than its overt message; R. Shem Tov ben Shem Tov would argue that the deeper the Guide was understood, the clearer became the pernicious influence of its views. For Abulafia, the case was quite different—the better the Guide was understood, the more Kabbalistic the book became. Therefore, what exactly was, according to Abulafia, Kabbalistic in the Guide? In his introduction to the commentary named *Sitre Torah*, the Kabbalist indicated:[114]

> ...the commentary *Sitre Torah*, which was begotten by the *Guide of the Perplexed*, and it became its son; and as its intentions [i.e., the Guide's] are two, namely the interpretation of the equivocal terms and the interpretation of the parables of the prophecy, the intention of its offspring are also two, those which are the root of every religious wisdom, namely the interpretation of the reason for the life of the rational soul and the interpretation of the worship of God out of love. And even if the subject of each of them [the two books] is special to itself, everything goes to the same place.

Abulafia presented the Guide as an exegetical enterprise, focusing on an appropriate understanding of the Biblical text. His own work dealt with the

[114]Ms. Paris, 774, fol. 115b: פירוש סתרי תורה אשר מורה הנבוכים הולידו ויהי לו לבן ואם כוונותיו היו שתים הם ביאור שיתוף השמות וביאור משלי הנבואה, כותת תולדתו גם כן שתים המה אשר המה שורש כל חכמה תוריית והם ביאור סיבת חיי הנפש המשכלת וביאור עבודת השם מאהבה. ואם עניין כל אחד מהם לעצמו נתייחד, הכל הולך למקום אחד

correct understanding of religious life, not of a religious text. However, Abulafia remarked that the aims of both books concord. Since his work was considered to be a continuation of the Guide, we may assume that Abulafia regarded the exegetical facet as the plain meaning of the Guide, whereas the spiritual one was viewed as being a higher plane which could be reached only after the acquisition of true understanding of the Biblical text. This analysis is corroborated by another text by Abulafia; since Ezekiel's description of the *Merkavah* is obscure, its explanation was supplied by Maimonides:[115]

> ...his words are difficult and sealed, and their gates closed to us, and we had no key in order to open them, until the Rabbi [Maimonides] raised and delivered the intellectual key[116] to us and he stirred us to open with it most of the closed gates in the words of prophecy, by his indication to us that there are endless equivocal terms in the words of the sages, and thereby we opened our eyes and have seen the bright light and radiant splendor, and I comprehended many issues as they really are, and as the prophets and sages have done, he has done too, and afterwards our eyes were open.

Therefore, the Guide supplied the key for the text. Following the correct reading, there was a disclosure of truths which are described in mystical terms: revelation of lights, etc. Again, the Guide served as an intermediary: he enabled the human spirit to pass from simplistic apperception of a text to a spiritual experience. This experience is hinted at several times in Abulafia's commentaries, and I shall limit my comments solely to the names of Abulafia's commentaries which are partial synonyms. The first commentary is called *Sefer ha-Geulah*—the *Book of Redemption*—and in the other commentary, *Sitre Torah*—the redemption—is hinted at in these words:[117]

> All the secrets [of the Guide] are thirty-six, and whoever will meditate upon them in order to understand them by means of speculation and to

[115]*Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*, Ms. München, 408, fol. 73b: אלא שדבריו הם סתומים וחתומים ושעריהם נעולים בפניו ולא היה בידינו מפתח לפתוח בו עד שקם הרב ז"ל ומסר בידינו מפתח הרעיון, והערנו לפתוח בו רוב השערים הסגורים בכל דברי הנבואה בהגידו לנו ז"ל כי יש בדברי החכמים כמו הם שמות משתתפים אין קץ, ובזה פקחנו עיניו וראינו אור בהיר חדר מזהיר והכרנו עניינים רבים כאמתתם וכאשר עשו הנביאים והחכמים עשה גם הוא, אחר נפקחו עינינו. See also the poem "אשתעשע במשך קדמון", seemingly authored by Abulafia: "קורא דת בן עמרם, עם דת משה בר מימון" הנשע *Koveẓ 'al Yad* 1 (1885), p. 4, and *Shirim, Zemirot ve-Tishbaḥot* (Constantinople, 1545), no.12.

[116]The phrase מפתח הרעיון is also the title of one of Abulafia's earliest works. In the introductory poem, Abulafia links the opening of the gates by the intellectual key and a vision (Ms. Vatican, 291, fol. 21b): לכל נפש משכלת תענג חזיון / ושעריו פתוחים במפתח רהעיון.

[117]Ms. Paris, 774, fol. 117a: וכלל הסודות הם ליו ואשר ישים דעתו עליהם להבינם בעיון ולהשיג הכוונה מהם, גאולה תהיה לו.

comprehend their real meaning, he[118] will be redeemed.

In the same way, Abulafia remarked, in his introduction to *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*:[119] "I will open my mouth[to speak] without parables and allegories, in order to save the rational soul from the [four] elements, and I shall tell her secrets."

Abulafia's statement that he would speak without allegories fit the above-mentioned view perfectly, that the exegetical process of "purifying" the Bible was already accomplished by Maimonides' activity. Now, Abulafia was interested in the redemptive act of saving the soul by telling her the secrets. Therefore, "the life of the rational soul" is tantamount to her salvation, and both were acquired by means of the thirty-six secrets of the Guide. Again, according to the Kabbalist, the word "geulah"—redemption—is formed from ג and אלה, according to the defective spelling, thereby alluding to the thirty-six secrets: אלה and the three parts of the Guide.

This is a conception of the Guide as a necessary step in the spiritual elevation of man's soul from a "vulgar" type of religion, based upon a plain understanding of the Biblical text to a "philosophical" religion, which allegorized the non-philosophical aspects of religion, and finally, a mystical-redemptive religion, focused upon ecstatic-missionary and, sometimes, even unitive experiences. The last stage found its expression in Abulafia's peculiar interpretation of the Guide, which is only implicitly existent in Maimonides' book.

Abulafia mystically interpreted the Guide which had interpreted the Bible and classical Rabbinic literature allegorically. According to this view, the Guide, in its innermost core, was the source of a mystical outlook of religion. Let us put it in a negative form: the Guide represented the negation of the simplistic understanding of the Bible by the vulgus. This philosophical understanding was, in turn, negated by a mystical understanding which now focused upon the spiritual experience of the soul and not upon correct theological understanding, neglecting the intellectual achievement of the philosophers or, to put it Neoplatonically, Abulafia's interpretation of the Guide represented the flight of the individual soul from matter to God, with the Guide being an intermediary step concentrated upon the intellect. I should like to stress my usage of the term "mystical" in this context: I do not refer to vague explanations of Maimonidean passages by twisting their physical significance into a cosmic one;[120] or the usage of Kabbalistic exegetical

[118]Cf. Leviticus XXV,31. Compare the poem quoted in n.115 above, where the student of Torah together with Maimonides' doctrine is qualified as "saved"—נושע.

[119]Ms. München, 408, fol. 1b: ואפתח את פי בלתי משלים וחידות / להציל הנפש המשכלת מן היסודות ההווות הנפסדות / ואגיד לה סתרות.

[120]Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude," p. 209, has adequately formulated this point.

devices—gematria, notaricon, etc.—in order to explain the Guide. Mystical, in my discussion, stands for the concentrated effort of man to achieve an extreme spiritual experience. Seen from this perspective, Maimonides' Guide can be regarded as a principal positive catalyzer of Jewish mysticism, as it found its major expression in ecstatic Kabbalah. If its role in the formation of the theurgical-thesophical Kabbalah was that of a negative catalyzer, the situation now changed drastically.

How did the Guide contribute to the mystical experience of its reader? Abulafia offered an interesting answer:[121]

> Indeed, I did inform you that the true knowledge of the Name cannot be known, from *Sefer Yeẓirah* alone, even if you know all the above-mentioned commentaries on it, nor from the *Guide of the Perplexed* alone, even if you know all commentaries on it; but only when the two types of knowledge of those two books will be linked together.

Therefore, according to Abulafia, the Guide, per se, is insufficient for the supreme gnosis, the knowledge of the Divine Name. The ultimate aim of this knowledge was a mystical experience which could not be attained by the exclusive concentration upon the content of the Guide alone:[122]

> In the Name, my reason has found a ladder, in order to ascend to the degrees of visions. And the wholesomeness of the speech was accomplished in it[123] [i.e., the Name] either by examination or experience.[124] It is hidden from all the philosophers and its name [i.e., of the Name] is the intellectual key.[125]

[121]*Oẓar Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford, 1580, fol. 16b-17a: uhafgn lghsun hbt obntu שידיעת השם באמת אי אפשר לדעתה לא מספר יצירה לבדו אפי' ואפי' עם ידיעת כל פירושיו הנזכרים. ולא ממורה הנבוכים לבדו ואפי' עם ידיעת כל פירושיו, עד שתחוברנה שתי הידיעות של שני הספרים האלה יחד.

[122]*Mafteaḥ ha-Ra'ayon*, Ms. Vatican, 291, fol. 21a: בשם מצא שכלי סולם - לעלות אל מעלות חזיון וכלל כל הדבור נשלם - בו בבחינה ובנסיון מכל חכמי מחקר נעלם - ושמו מפתח הרעיון.

[123]Compare *Sefer Yezirah*, II, 5: "כל היצור וכל הדבור יוצא בשם אחד" See Scholem, *Les origines*, p. 38 n.44.

[124]These words occur, in a similar context, in the aforecited excerpt from *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, n.82 above. Their occurrence stresses the experimental nature of Abulafia's method: not solely a gnosis, but a practical application of same.

It is certain that this phrase is influenced by the common opening of magical devices: בחון ומנסה. Jewish magic, as we know, is a highly linguistic lore.

[125]It is interesting to note that the term "key," "Mafteaḥ," is part of some of the titles of Abulafia's books: "Mafteaḥ ha-Ra'ayon," "Mafteaḥ ha-Ḥokhmot," "Mafteaḥ ha-Sefirot," etc. In the context of our citation, it is also worthwhile remarking that medieval treatises using "key" as part of their titles are sometimes of a magical nature, in Arabic, Hebrew, as well as Latin literature. The term "Mafteaḥ ha-Kabbalah"—the Key of Kabbalah—recurs in *Sefer ha-Ẓeruf*, written by an anonymous student of Abulafia's: see Ms. München, 22 fol. 196b. "Mafteḥot ha-Kabbalah"

There is an element unknown by the philosopher which was necessary to the mystical experience: the gnosis of the Name. This Name is the quintessence of all the linguistic material. This is obviously the doctrine of *Sefer Yeẓirah*. Therefore, there are two "intellectual keys": that of the Guide—the allegorical exegesis—and that of *Sefer Yeẓirah*—the knowledge of the Name. The combination of the two contributed to the peculiar nature of Abulafia's commentaries on the Guide—they made large-scale usage of devices alluded to in *Sefer Yeẓirah* and its commentaries in order to elucidate on issues in the Guide. Furthermore, these devices were applied—according to Abulafia himself—when he discussed the more esoteric secrets of Maimonides:[126]

> Sometimes, when a secret occurs, which is more hidden than another, and I have to demonstrate it using demonstration, strange according to the views of philosophers, namely [a secret] which was demonstrated using methods called by us religious demonstrations, which are within the methods of combination of letters and their secrets, which cannot be demonstrated to many of the speculative thinkers, since they comprehend neither their secrets nor anything that pertains to them. However, they can be demonstrated to few of the intellectuals [belonging to] the divine Kabbalah, namely those whom the Intellect illuminated, that is the Agent Intellect which announced to us the ultimate true knowledge.

A different type of Kabbalah is mentioned here, the divine one which is the result of the illumination of the Agent Intellect upon some *illuminati*, who were able to comprehend the more esoteric secrets of the Guide; they alone could be convinced of the validity of the linguistic methods of demonstration stemming from *Sefer Yeẓirah*. Therefore, only the supplementation of the Guide by *Sefer Yeẓirah* could provide a more profound insight into the ultimate secrets of the Guide. According to Abulafia, the religious methods of demonstration—namely the combination of letters—are also mystical techniques which were capable of inducing paranormal experiences. Therefore, after the acquisition of a relatively correct theology by understanding the Guide, the application of linguistic practices caused a certain experiential relationship between the subject and the superior spiritual entities: the active intellect or God. Furthermore, only those *illuminati* who experienced a touch from the Agent Intellect could receive some of the Guide. Indeed, the first

is the name of R. Barukh Togarmi's *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, a treatise studied by, and highly influential on, Abulafia.

[126] *Sitre Torah*, Ms. Paris, 774, fol. 117b: ולפעמי יזדמן סוד הוא נעלם מזולתו, ואצטרך לאמתו במופתים זרים מדיעות חוקרי מדע כלום שאמתתהו בדרכים הנקראים אלינו מופתים תורים והם מכלל דרכי צירוף האותיות וסודם אשר לא יתאמתו להרבה מן המעיינים מפני שלא השיגו סתריהם ולא דבר מהם. ואמנם יתאמתו למעט ממשכילי הקבלה האלהית והם אשר הצליחם השכל...והוא הפועל אשר הודיעה לנו תכלית ידיעה אמיתית. See also Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," pp. 78-79, and n.31 above.

commentary on the Guide was composed as a result of a command received during a revelationary experience which not only initiated the writing of the commentary, but also supplied information concerning the way it was to be done.[127] Therefore, Abulafia deemed himself to be the perfect commentator on the Guide—he inherited the list of secrets implicit in this work and experienced a revelation regarding its interpretation.[128] To put it in a more general context: ecstatic Kabbalah alone holds the keys to the most concealed secrets of the Guide. It is an ironic stroke of history that some of the elements of Jewish esotericism which Maimonides consciously ignored, or eventually even attacked, turned in Abulafia's works into main instruments for the penetration of Maimonides' secrets.

It is no wonder that an ardent Maimonidean such as R. Zeraḥiah ben Shealtiel Ḥen vehemently protested the usage of gematria and combination of letters in connection with the Guide.[129] Such a sharp criticism seems to be the result of the dissemination of Abulafia's peculiar method of interpreting the Guide, apparently in Italy, since R. Zeraḥiah stated that there were many persons who "misinterpreted" the term "son"—"ben"—as referring to the Divine Names, a device which indeed recurred in Abulafia's commentaries.[130] His mention of "many persons" together with the fact that some details adduced by R. Zeraḥiah in this context did not occur in exactly the same form in Abulafia's commentaries apparently point to a situation wherein the Kabbalist's ideas were already well known in differing versions when R. Zeraḥiah criticized them. Since, as we have already seen from his *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*,[131] Abulafia criticized some contemporaries who misunderstood the Guide, it is possible that these short references allude to a reciprocal criticism.[132] In addition, the Kabbalists who opposed Abulafia also derided his commentaries on the Guide. In my opinion, an allusion in this very direction is to be found in R. Shelomo ben Abraham ibn Adret's attack on the Kabbalist where he accused him of interpreting the Bible in the way of gematria, and the words of wisemen as well—דברי החכמים—which could be understood to be a hint to Abulafia's interpretations of Maimonides' Guide.[133] Two centuries later R. Jehudah Ḥayyat was more explicit; he

[127] See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 10.

[128] See his *Sefer ha-Ḥeshek*, Ms. New York, JTS, 1801, fol. 4b, where Abulafia asserts that he received oral Kabbalistic traditions from the sages of his generation, as well as "supernal Kabbalistic traditions," from God Himself; see also nn.88, 90 above.

[129] See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 40, n.28.

[130] See Ravitzki (n.19 above), pp. 106-107.

[131] See n.89 above.

[132] It is perhaps significant to mention that explicit discrepancies between R. Zeraḥia's perception of the Guide and that of R. Hillel of Verona, Abulafia's teacher, are extant in their writings. See Ravitzki (n.19 above), pp. 269-292.

[133] See his *Responsa*, I, Nr. 548: "ולוקח הכתובים ודברי החכמים בגימטריאות"

bluntly asserted that Abulafia explained the words of the Guide using "an arbitrarily invented Kabbalah which did not arise either in Maimonides' thought or in his heart."[134] Ironically enough, Ḥayyat quoted from Abulafia's commentary on the Guide in an approving manner, without apparently being aware of the source of his quotation.[135] Notwithstanding these critical remarks, Abulafia's commentaries survived, one of them in many manuscripts, two of them translated into Latin, and they were influential among Jewish Kabbalists.[136] For our purpose, it is worthwhile to quote Pico della Mirandola's description of Maimonides as a hidden Kabbalist, which occurs in his *Conclusiones*[137] As Ch. Wirszubski has proven,[138] this perception of the Philosopher was influenced by Abulafia's view:

> Sicut Aristoteles diviniorem philosophiam, quam philosophi antiqui sub fabulis et apologis nelarunt ipse sub philosophicae speculationis facie dissimulauit, et uerborum brevitate obscuranit, ita Rabi Moyses Aegypticus in libri, qui a Latinis dicitur dux neutrorum, dum per superficialem uerborum corticem uidetur cum philosophis ambulare, per latentes profundi sensus intelligentias mysteria complectitur cabalae.

It is no wonder, therefore, that one of the first followers of Pico, Johannes Reuchlin, frequently quoted out of the Guide as if it were a Kabbalistic book.[139] Those were the authors who disseminated Abulafia's Kabbalization of Maimonides' teachings into European culture.

V

However, it seems that Abulafia's attitude toward Maimonides contributed to a positive perception of his figure also in the works of some members of the ecstatic school of Kabbalah. The anonymous author of *Sha'are Ẓedek*, a former Maimonidean student,[140] remained sympathetic toward Maimonides, even after his conversion to mystical practices.[141] This is presumably also

[134]*Minḥat Yehudah* in *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua, 1558), fol. 3b: וגם עשה ספר מורה המורה והוא פי' לספר המורה על דרך הקבלה ראה עד כמה הגיע סכלותו לפרש דברי המורה עם דברי קבלה בדויה מלבו לא עלתה על מחשבתו של הרמב"ם ז"ל ולא עלתה על לבו.

[135]See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 12, n.44.

[136]Ibid., p. 12.

[137]*Opera* (Basle, 1557), p. 113: Conclusio 63.

[138]See his paper, "*Liber Redemptionis*—An Early Version of R. Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalistic Commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed*, in the Latin Translation of Flavius Mitridathes," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* III (1969) 148-149.

[139]See François Secret's translation of *De Arte Cabalistica* (Paris, 1973), where he pointed out the instances when Reuchlin used Maimonides; see especially pp. 37, 44-45, 75-76.

[140]See n.80 above.

[141]See *Sha'are Ẓedek*, Ms. Jerusalem, 8° 148, fol. 39b, 40b-41b.

the attitude of R. Natan, the teacher of R. Isaac of Acre, who was apparently influenced by Abulafia's interpretation of issues concerning the *Merkavah*.[142] The anonymous Kabbalist who composed the Abulafian *Or ha-Menorah* was likewise interested in Maimonides' works, and his teachings were integrated into ecstatic Kabbalistic material.[143]

A relatively positive appreciation of Maimonides is also obvious in R. Isaac of Acre, another main representative of ecstatic Kabbalah; like Abulafia and the author of *Sha'are Ẓedek*, he was also interested in mystical experience whose psychological terminology was heavily influenced by philosophic terms. What seemed to be new with R. Isaac was the recurrence of the phrase "ha-Rav ha-Ma'amin" as an epithet for Maimonides.[144] I should like to adduce the main text, including this phrase:[145]

> I have contemplated[146] the words of the prophets and Sages on the hardness of dispersion of Iṣrael, which is referred to by the words of the prophet:[147] "[Now] for a long season Israel has been without One God, and without a teaching priest and without law," and our Sages said:[148]

[142]See Moshe Idel, "The World of Imagination and the Collectanaea of ha-Ran," *Eshel Beer Sheva* II (1980) 172-173 (Hebrew).

[143]See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," p. 79; compare Ms. Jerusalem, 8° 1303, fol. 29b, 42b, 46b.

[144]*Oẓar Ḥayyim*, Ms. Moscow-Günzburg, 775, fol. 85b, 151a, 241a. See Gottlieb, *Studies*, pp. 231-232. Naḥmanides as הרב הנאמן, see *Oẓar Ḥayyim*, Ms. Oxford, 1911, fol. 159b.

[145]*Oẓar Ḥayyim*, Ms. Moscow-Günzburg, 775, fol. 183a: השתכלתי בדברי הנביאים והחכמים על תוקף גלות ישראל הוא מה שאמ' הנביא ע"ה ימים רבים לישראל ללא תורה וללא כהן וללא אלהי אמת ואז"ל עתידה תורה להשתכח מישראל וראיתי כי כל זה נתקיים עד עת בא הרב המאמין באי"ו המיל"ה במצרים ור' יעקב הנזיר והראב"ד בפרובינציא והרב הנאמן לאיו המיל"ה בכתלוניא והרב ר' יעקב הכהן ור' יוסף גיקטיליא בשגוביא וספר הזוהר לרשב"י בספרד שעל ידי אלה גדלו מורי ההוראה בלא יגיעה, וגדל השכל ע"י השכל הפילוסופיא לאשר חננו האל רוח פילוסופיי ולא רוח קבליי וקדושת הקבלה לאשר חננו האל רוח קבליי ולא פילוסופיי, אמנם אשרי האיש אשר חננו האל ג' רוחות אלה כאחד רוח הוריי הוא התוריי ורוח פילוסופי ורוח קבליי בי הוא ודאי השלם וראוי שתשרה עליו שכינה אלא שדורו אינו ראוי לכך. See also Ben-Zion Dinur, *Israel Ba-Golah* (Jerusalem, 1969), II, 4, p. 326. Compare also R. Shabbetai Horowitz' view referred to above, n.77.

[146]The Hebrew verb "השתכלתי" is used in mystical context throughout R. Isaac's book; see also Daniel Ch. Matt, *Zohar, The Book of Enlightenment* (New York, 1983), p. 224.

[147]II Chr. 15,3. The same Biblical verse recurs in a similar context already in R. Ezra of Gerone's commentary on the Song of Songs, ed. Chavel, pp. 479, 514, and in R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi's *Ma'amar ya-Yihud*, M. Jerusalem, 4° 537, fol. 144b (and see below our hypothesis that R. Isaac of Acre's view of Maimonides influenced R. Abraham's brother-in-law, R. Abraham Zacuto). See also the recurring usage of this verse in Abraham Cardozo's work. R. Isaac used this verse in his *Meirat Eynayim*, p. 10 without, however, any historical overtone.

[148]*Shabat*, fol. 138b, etc.

"the Torah will be forgotten from Israel." And I understood that all this came true, until the time the believing Rabbi BAYO HMYLH[149] has come to Egypt, and R. Jacob the Nazarite and R. Abraham ben David in Provence, and the faithful Rabbi LAYO HMYLH in Catalonia and R. Jacob ha-Kohen and R. Joseph Gikatilla in Segovia, and the book of *Zohar* [written] by R. Shimeon bar Yohai in Sefarad[150] since by these [persons] the number of teachers of law easily increased, and the intellect increased by the intellect of philosophy to those whom God bestowed with philosophical spirit, but not with Kabbalistic spirit, and the holiness of Kabbalah [increased], to those whom God bestowed with Kabbalistic spirit but not with philosophical spirit. However, happy is the person whom God bestowed with those three spirits all together, the spirit of teaching, namely the religious spirit, and the philosophical spirit and the Kabbalistic spirit, since he is for sure perfect and worthy that the Divine Presence will descend upon him, unless the generation would not be worthy of it.

Therefore, Maimonides' activity in Egypt was, according to R. Isaac, part of a broader Renaissance of the study of Torah and Jewish spiritualism, whose center was, however, the Spanish provinces and southern France. With the exception of Maimonides, all the historical figures were mentioned because of their reputation as Kabbalists. R. Isaac obviously distinguished between those who were Kabbalists and the others who were only philosophers, without, however, referring directly to Maimonides' lack of Kabbalistic lore. Is this only the result of the conciseness of the text? Has the term "ha-Rav ha-Ma'amin" any implication connected to Kabbalah? This description of Maimonides evidently corresponds to that of Naḥmanides, who is alluded to by the title "the faithful Rabbi." The terms מאמין and נאמן are equivalent from the numerical point of view,[151] and, as we know, R. Isaac was immersed in these types of exegeses. Therefore, theoretically, this correspondence may hint at a parallelism between Maimonides and Naḥmanides. However, more convincing is a text found in R. Abraham Zacuto's *Sefer ha-Yoḥasin*.[152] Naḥmanides, according to Zacuto, criticized Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Miẓvot*; nevertheless, he testified to Maimonides' piety who "destroyed the unbelievers who argued against the Kabbalah, and he is called the believing Rabbi." The opposition between the unbelievers—המינין—and the

[149]The meaning of these consonants, recurring in R. Isaac's work, is not clear.

[150]I refrain from translating this term as 'Spain,' since the medieval usage of this name is not always clear; sometimes it refers to Castilia alone.

[151].נאמן = 141 = מאמין

[152]*Sefer ha-Yoḥasin ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 249. והוא השיג על ס' המצות להרמב"ם והעיד על חסידות הרמב"ם...שהשמיד המינין החולקין על הקבלה והוא נקרא הרב המאמין. See also R. Gedaliah ibn Yaḥia, *Shalshelet ha-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1962), p. 100.

believing Rabbi—המאמין—is explicit.[153] Therefore, he understood the attribute "believing" as referring to Maimonides' war which he allegedly waged against those who criticized "Kabbalah," be it merely tradition or, more peculiarly, "esoteric tradition." Therefore, we have two texts wherein the phrase "ha-Rav ha-Ma'amin" occurs in contexts related to Kabbalah which may reasonably be understood to mean esoteric tradition. Moreover, it seems that the second text also may have stemmed from a lost work by R. Isaac of Acre, *Sefer Divre ha-Yamim*,[154] which had been known only by one later writer, R. Abraham Zacuto.[155] If our hypothesis is true, then the use of the term "Kabbalah" as esoteric tradition in the quotation from *Sefer ha-Yoḥasin* became even more reasonable. Once again, the legend of Maimonides' conversion to Kabbalah by R. Jacob the Nazarite seemed to be connected to the tradition of R. Jacob as a Kabbalist, as it was presented by R. Isaac of Acre in his *Meirat Eyinaim*.[156] Last but not least, Maimonides was construed as a Kabbalist in a text in which Naḥmanides was also mentioned, and both of them were described as "faithful"; the text was authored by R. Abraham Abulafia. In the Latin version of the first commentary on the Guide, *Liber Redemptionis*, we read:[157]

[153]Compare also to *Oẓar Ḥayyim*, Ms. Moscow-Günzburg, 775, fol. 49a: שהמאמין בנסתר לבד הרי הוא בכלל המינים וזן הן פתא' הפילוסופים שהן מתפלספים וסומכין על דעת עיונים והם חכמים בעיניהם. Are the "Minim" in R Abraham Zacuto's text philosophers who are combatted by Maimonides? The pun on מין - מאמין occurs already in a statement attributed to R. Isaac the Blind: "ואם יאמין באין סוף ולא יאמין בספירות הוא מין גמור" See Scholem, "New Document," p. 150. The deniers of "Sefirot" might indeed be philosophers.

See also the tradition on Maimonides' tombstone upon which his foes allegedly engraved the words "מוחרם ומון"; we may suppose that there was also a tradition which included an inscription such as "הרב המאמין" which was changed into "מוחרם ומין."

[154]The content of this book is hagiographical anecdotes: see Goldreich (n.51 above), p. 409.

[155]See Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, I, pp. 28-34.

[156]See Scholem, "Mi-Ḥoker le-Mekubbal," pp. 95-97.

[157]See Wirszubski (n.138 above), p. 142. This book of Abulafia's was composed in 1273 (cf. Wirszubski, p. 140); it seems that only shortly afterwards, R. Jesaiah ben Moses of Salerno referred to his father, a commentator on the Guide, as a "third Moses," after the ancient one and Maimonides. See Ms. Münich, 370, fl. 9a-b. Thanks are due to my friend Dr. Aviezer Ravitzki who kindly brought this remark to my attention. See the text printed in Joseph Sermonetta, "Moses ben Solomon of Salerno and Nicholaus de Giovinazo on Maimonides' 'Guide to the Perplexed'," *Yiun* 20 (1970) 294, n.3 (Hebrew).

See also Paul Christiani's assertion in his dispute with Naḥmanides (ed. Chavel, *Kitve ha-Ramban*, I, p. 315): ואני אביא ראיה מחכם גדול שלהם, לא היה להם כמותו היום ד' מאות שנה ושמו מאישטר' משה די גיפטי

cuius modi apud nos Moises legislator noster et Rabenu moxe Et cuius modi est doctor ipse rabi Moises, super quibus tribus sit pax qui sunt tres Moses fideles testes, sapientes et Cabaliste qui dixerunt nobis mundum esse innouatum.

The three faithful Moses were, therefore, Kabbalists. The term "fideles" fits the description of Naḥmanides found in R. Isaac's text perfectly. However, Abulafia did not distinguish between them, and the possibility exists that before R. Isaac there was a phrase "הרב הנאמן" connected to Maimonides; there is, actually, more than a possibility. However, there is no doubt that the latter was regarded as a Kabbalist, as is convincingly shown by another Abulafian text.[158] Therefore, we have two more texts wherein Maimonides was conceived as a Kabbalist within a context where Naḥmanides was also mentioned, together with his attribute of "fideles"—faithful.

We may even, perhaps, go a step further in comparing Abulafia's text to that of R. Isaac: each of the three Moses were referred to as "testes" ("witnesses"), "sapientes" ("wisemen") and "Cabaliste" ("Kabbalists"). R. Isaac mentioned three perfections: religious, philosophical and Kabbalistic, which could occur together.[159] Is not the correspondence between these two sets of three virtues remarkable? And again, Abulafia's mentioning the three Moses together in two of his texts may have implied that he, as well as R. Isaac afterwards, conceived the period of the two Moses as an important religious period, without precedent since Moses the lawgiver. Or, in the words of the

[158]See *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* (n.81 above), p. 20: ושם בן מ״ב ופירושו שרמזו הרב במורה בחלק ראשון פרק ס״ב ואמר שידיעתו מביאה לידי השגת השכל הפועל עם מה שחיבר אליו לפניו ואחריו, באשר זכר בו כמו שהעיד על סוד הצירוף בחלק ב׳ בענין הנבואה במלת בחל עם חבל ושם בן ע״ב שלא זכרו הוא ז״ל, וכל שכן לפי מה שגלה איש האלהים גם כן משה עבד יי׳ בפירושי התורה הוא הנלחם מלחמות יי׳ הוא הנחמני חברו של המימוני ששניהם תלמידי העמרמי שהם נשיאי העולם שלשתם ע״ה, דאמר (רמב״ן) בראש ספרו עוד יש בידינו קבלה של אמת. Therefore, Maimonides' allusions to combinations of letters of Divine Names correspond, according to this text, to Naḥmanides' tradition on the Torah as a continuum of Divine Names, which is referred to as Kabbalah. Interesting enough is the fact that R. Shem Tov ibn Gaon reports that he had seen in Spain, at the end of the thirteenth century, an epistle attributed to Maimonides wherein were issues akin to those of the "authentic Kabbalists which were alluded to by our great Rabbi Naḥmanides at the beginning of his commentary on the Pentateuch." It is possible that the pseudepigraphic epistle included discussion on Divine Names which were close to those of Naḥmanides. Compare also the spurious *Yggeret ha-Sodot*, attributed to Maimonides, where Divine Names are mentioned. See *Ḥemdah Genuzah*, ed. Z. E. Edelman (Königsburg, 1856), pp. 43-44.

[159]Compare also to the triad of virtues R. Isaac attributed to one of his masters: modesty, knowledge of philosophy, and Kabbalistic-mystical capacities. Cf. Moshe Idel, "Prophetic Kabbala and the Land of Israel" in R. I. Cohen, ed., *Vision and Conflict in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem/New York, 1985), pp. 108-109, n.26.

well-known dictum: "From Moses to Moses, there was no one like Moses." Before leaving R. Isaac's view of Maimonides, I should like to note the deep divergence between his sympathetic relation to Maimonides, versus that of his master in Acre, R. Shelomo Petit. The latter was not only a fierce anti-Aristotelian—a position adopted by R. Isaac as well[160]—but also an active anti-Maimonidean. Here, the ways of these men differed; did Abulafia contribute to this independent stand of R. Isaac's? In light of the previous discussion, I am inclined to give a positive answer.

Let us turn for a moment to the text adduced above from *Sefer ha-Yoḥasin*; the description of Maimonides as someone who destroyed the unbelievers reverberates in a passage by R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi, brother-in-law of R. Abraham Zacuto, in his *Ma'amar ha-Yiḥud*.[161] There, the Kabbalist asserts that Maimonides "waged a war against the philosophers and he had caused them to fall down and blowed them and destroyed them." The use of the verb "הִשְׁמִד" corresponds to the text by Zacuto, where it appeared in a similar context, and it seems reasonable to assume a textual filiation between the two texts. If my assumption is correct, then the "unbelievers" mentioned in Zacuto's work are to be identified as the philosophers in Abraham ha-Levi's text and, given this identification, the expression "the believing Rabbi"

[160]See the legend adduced by R. Isaac in the name of R. Shelomo Petit on Aristotle and the wife of Alexander Macedon in *Meirat Eynayim* (n.51 above), pp. 56-57, and Goldreich's discussion, pp. 403-404, n.21.

[161]Ms. Jerusalem, 4⁰ 537, fol. 147a-b: מעלתו של הרמב״ם ז״ל ורחב דעת כפתחו של אולם וכי הוא ערך מלחמות על הפילוסופים והפילם והכם והשמידם. Maimonides is regarded as a new David who successfully fights against the Philistine danger represented by philosophy. It is worthwhile remarking that R. Abraham ha-Levi had access to an unidentified work by R. Isaac of Acre, from which he quotes an autobiographical anecdeote (see n.154 above). See his "Horaot be-'Yniane Mal'akhim," *Kerem Ḥemed* 9 (1856) 146. Was this anecdote part of *Divre ha-Yamim*? Compare also to the superlatives R. Abraham applies to Maimonides in his commentary on the *Propheties of Naḥman*, Ms. Jerusalem, 8⁰3935, fol. 13a, and in the pseudepigraphic work, *Masoret ha-Berit*, which is heavily influenced by R. Abraham ha-Levi's works, where Maimonides is presented as a pious authority who, like Moses, is described as בכל בית השם נאמן הוא; cf. J. M. Toledano, *Ha-Ẓofeh le-Ḥokhmat Israel*, 15, p. 303. It is plausible that Maimonides contributed his *Pirke Moshe* to this positive conception wherein Galen was sharply criticized. Compare to R. Yeḥiel Nissim of Pisa, R. Abraham ha-Levi's younger contemporary, who asserts, in his *Commentary to Ten Sefirot*, Ms. New York, JTS, R. 1586, fol. 127b: ל״ז מ״ר לדגה ברה תרכשם יהת שלמה אשר טען והשיב לאפיקורוס בפרקים המפורסמי׳ ברפואה הנק׳ פרקי משה ושנס מתניו להחזיק התורה הקדושה ולהודיע גנותו וסכלותו הגדול. See also ibid., fol. 148b: אני לא נתכוונתי לערוך כנגד הפילוסופי׳ כי אין זאת כוונת המאמר הזה וברוך השם אשר לא השבית לנו גואל בעל ספר הכוזר והרמב״ם ז״ל ואחרים זולש לשבר מלתעות אפיקורסים וכופרים

has an anti-philosophical overtone, thereby strengthening the possibility that this phrase alludes to a Kabbalistic view of Maimonides.

VI

Let us, in brief, analyze the nature of Maimonides' views which influenced this type of Kabbalah. There are, in my opinion, two main subjects which were adopted from the Guide by Abulafia: the Maimonidean metaphysics, in the larger sense of the term, and the psychology of the prophetic phenomenon.[162] Abulafia agreed with Maimonides' conception of God as intellect, intelligibilia and intellect as the main definition of Divinity, while the negative theology was only secondary for his Kabbalah.[163] The interest in both types of theology may correspond to Abulafia's perception of Maimonides as having provided the first "intellectual" key, therefore a correct understanding of the Biblical anthropomorphic expressions. More important for Abulafia, however, was the relatively elaborated discussion of prophecy, where Maimonides presented a psychological system which, as it is possible to demonstrate, served the Kabbalist in his attempts to interpret his own mystical experiences as prophetic events.[164] Maimonides intended to describe the classical prophecy by using medieval Aristotelian parameters. By his psychological examination of the prophetic experience, Maimonides paved, consiously or unconsciously, the way to a actual application of these terms.[165] In other words, Maimonides supplied Abulafia, and to a certain extent his followers as well, with a psychological scheme which gave legitimation to their inner experiences. By construing this psychological type of Jewish prophecy, Maimonides enabled Jewish mystics to understand themselves by using their contemporaries' psychology. Moreover, the formulation of Abulafia's experiences as *unio mystica*, which occurred also in his commentaries on the

[162]See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," pp. 86-128; idem, "Abraham Abulafia and *Unio Mystica*" in M. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (New York, 1989), pp. 5-11, 16-18. It is worthwhile noting that Maimonides' definition of the prophetic phenomenon was adopted with some slight changes by R. Joseph Ashkenazi. See his *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah* (n.90 above), p. 219, and by R. Ḥayyim Vital in *Sha'are Kedushah*, Ms. British Library, 749, fol. 21a. The first of these Kabbalists might have been influenced by Abulafia (see n.90 above), whereas the last one was obviously under the spell of the ecstatic Kabbalah. We see, therefore, that the affinity between Abulafia and a certain Kabbalist has, as a correlation, a rather positive attitude toward Maimonides. This assertion holds also for Kordovero's sympathy for Maimonides, on the one hand, and his positive attitude toward Abulafia, on the other. On Kordovero and Abulafia, see Idel, ibid, pp. 136-140.

[163]Idel, "Abraham Abulafia,"pp. 434-435.

[164]Ibid., pp. 332-333.

[165]This issue must be treated separately.

Guide, employed unmistakable Maimonidean terminology: the total fusion of human intellect with divine one is expressed by means of the Aristotelian principle that at the moment of the cognitive process the knower identifies completely with the known.[166] Therefore, Maimonides contributed decisively to the formulation of central elements in Jewish mysticism, a phenomenon which still has to be analyzed in detail.

Let me exemplify this assertion by a concise discussion on the way Abulafia used Maimonides' view of "death by kiss." Along with the philosopher, at least as he expressed it exoterically, this type of experience was connected to a natural process of the gradual diminishing of the corporeal powers and the increasing of the spiritual forces; at the moment of death, the perfect man attained a final beatific experience which was limited to some Biblical figures. Even the pious and the prophets could not, according to Maimonides, reach this peak of spirituality.[167] With Abulafia, this motif underwent a major transformation:[168]

> Indeed—he says—whoever's soul will separate from him in the time of pronouncing [of the Divine Name], he will die by a Kiss, and this is why it is said:[169] "R. Akiba's soul departed when he pronounced: One."

Therefore, also R. Akiba died a beatific death by a Kiss. Moreover, everyone who died during the exercises Abulafia presented as Kabbalah may be considered as having died a death by a Kiss. Maimonides' restrictions of this death to the natural death of the perfects is ignored; someone could employ, voluntarily, ecstatic practices which could end in death and he would attain Maimonides' category of *summum perfectio*. Here we witness an actualization, and at the same time a certain popularization, of one of Maimonides' views.[170] We have here, *in nuce*, the road which Maimonides' thought travelled in entering the ecstatic Kabbalah. Interestingly enough, the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah also used Maimonides' concept of "death by a Kiss." However, as with Abulafia, these Kabbalists also seemed to ignore Maimonides' restriction of this phenomenon, and they hinted at the possibility that any union of the lower soul with the cosmic one which was accompan-

[166]This is the subject of a separate study; see n.162 above.

[167]See the Guide, III, 51.

[168]*Ḥayye ha-Olam ha-Ba*, Ms. Oxford, 1582, fol. 14b: ואמנם בי תפרד נשמתו ממנו בעת ההזכרה ימות בנשיקה ועל זה אמרו ר' עקיבה שיצתה נשמתו באחד. Compare also to R. Isaac of Acre's apperception of the "mystical" tannaim as models of differing types of mystical experiences; in his *Oẓar Ḥayyim*, he wrote: שאם רץ לבו ולא ישוב למקומו הרקי יקרה לו מקרה בן עזאי ואם ישוב למקומו כר' עקיבה יקרה לו מקרה ר' עקיבה. Ms. Moscow-Günzburg, 775, fol. 72b. On this subject, see Steven T. Katz, "Models, Modeling and Mystical Training," *Religion* 12 (1982) 247-275.

[169]*Berakhot*, fol. 61b.

[170]See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia," pp. 359-361.

ied by the "undressing" of the body was, finally, "death by a Kiss." Through this interpretation, which was presented by R. Menahem Recanati, Maimonides' view of Death by Kiss reached Renaissance culture and became widespread.[171] It is worthwhile to compare Maimonides' concept with the interpretations offered by these two branches of Kabbalah. Despite the Neoplatonic turn which occurred apparently since R. Menahem Recanati's opinion, Maimonides and the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah had something in common, as both lacked an element which was crucial in ecstatic Kabbalah. Abulafia presented an elaborate technique which enabled the mystic to attain this "death by a Kiss"—the pronunciation of divine names. Such a technique was missing in Maimonides and R. Menahem Recanati. Therefore, the addition of linguistic Kabbalah transformed Maimonides' concept into a possibly living reality, if we can describe "death" in these terms. Maimonides' philosophical interpretation of a Talmudic concept turned into a mystical experience through the introduction of elements found in ancient and medieval esoteric traditions. Maimonides was vivified by the very mentality he wanted to annihilate.

Interestingly enough, the same psychological elements which were adopted by Abulafia from Maimonides contributed also to the formation of some of Meister Eckhart's views, a fact whose extent is still a subject of research.[172] An examination of the fate of Maimonides' terminology in the further evolution of ecstatic Kabbalah evinces that its impact diminished with time. Abulafia's followers as well as parts of the pseudo-Maimonidean literature were influenced increasingly by Neoplatonic and Sufic thought,[173] leaving only limited areas of influence to the original Aristotelian terms. Like the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, the ecstatic one also continued to evolve according to inner laws of development, while the impetus provided by the appearance of Maimonides' thought gradually lost its importance, both for Jewish philosophy and Kabbalah.

VII

Let us summarize the previous discussion: Maimonides' vigorous presentation of a rationalistic system of thought as the authentic Jewish esotericism compelled the mythical-cosmogonic Jewish tradition to structure itself as an alternative; the latter came out from underground and formed the most creative reaction of Jewish traditionalism to the "intrusion" of alien thought style. I should like to stress that this reaction represents neither an invention of new myths—at least in the very first stage of the formation of Kabbalah

[171]See Chaim Wirszubski, *Three Studies in Christian Kabbala* (Tel Aviv, 1975), pp. 16-22 (Hebrew).

[172]See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 126; Idel (n.162 above), n.112.

[173]See Idel (n.142 above), pp. 167-168, and (n.159 above), pp. 120-126.

—nor ideas formulated *ex nihilo*, as opposed to Maimonides. It continued, in my opinion, ancient motifs and more comprehensive traditions, which culminated in the emergence of the theurgical-theosophic Kabbalah.

In the case of ecstatic Kabbalah, Maimonides' thought supplied key concepts necessary to the self-understanding and self-expression of mystics, who regarded their experiences as fraught with religious significance equal to the ancient prophecy, or even higher than that. In both cases, the writings of Maimonides contributed to the structuring modes of religious thought he did his best to combat.[174] It is more than ironical that, in the spurious epistles attributed to him, he is portrayed as someone who practiced *Hekhalot* techniques or recommended astral magic,[175] together with conjurings of angels employing Divine Names.[176] Pseudepigraphy has its sweet moments; history has no power over them.

[174]It is interesting to mention in this context the Neoplatonic-Ismailian trend of interpreting Maimonides in the East: see David R. Blumenthal, "Was There an Eastern Tradition of Maimonidean Scholarship?" *REJ* 138 (1979) 57-68.

[175]See *Migdal Oz* on Hilkhot Yesode Torah, ch. I. אני משה בר מימון כשירדתי לחדרי מרכבה בינותי בענין הקץ.

[176]*Yggeret ha-Sodot* in *Ḥemdah Genuzah* (n.158 above), pp. 43-44.

HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES

STUDIES IN MAIMONIDES

Edited by
ISADORE TWERSKY

Distributed by
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England
1990